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Return, O Shulamite!

RETURN, O SHULAMITE!

AND OTHER SERMONS

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I.

"RETURN, RETURN, O SHULAMITE; RETURN, RETURN!"

August 10, 1884.

"Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies."—SOLOMON'S SONG vi. 13.

THE translation into the word "Shulamite" is unhappy: it is unmusical, and misses the meaning. The Hebrew word is a feminine of "Solomon." "Solomon" may stand for the bridegroom's name, and then the well-beloved bride takes her husband's name in a feminine form of it, which is Shulamith, Salome, or perhaps better "Solyma." The King has named his name upon her, and as Caius has his Caiia, so Solomon has his Solyma. He is the Prince of Peace, and she is the Daughter of Peace. Aforetime she was called "the fairest among women," but now she is espoused unto her Lord, and has a fulness of peace. Therefore is she called the Peace-laden, or the Peace-crowned. You know how truly it is so with the justified in Christ Jesus. Because the sound is sweeter, and the sense is clearer, permit me to read the text thus—"Return, return, O Solyma: return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in Solyma? As it were the company of two armies." May the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rest upon us while we linger amid the verses of this Song of Loves.

A soul redeemed by blood, and brought by the Holy Spirit into loving, living, lasting union with the Well-

Beloved, cannot remain unnoticed. Solomon is known all over the world; Solomon is sought after for his wisdom, and therefore Solyma will shine with something of his brightness, and she will be enquired after too. In the Church of God no man liveth unto himself, or travelleth through the world unwatched. If you are interested in Christ, heaven and earth and hell will be interested in you. Some men are but as a chip in the porridge; they have no savor in themselves, and none comes from them; but the believing man, the Christ-communing man, is full of influences both repellent and attractive, and he may be sure that where he comes he will be known and read. As the house of Israel is among the nations like a burning torch in dry stubble, so also are the spiritual Israel. Voices will cry after the bride of Christ, "Return! Return! Return! Return!" A pilgrim bound for the Celestial City cannot go through the world, even through the worst part of it, such as Vanity Fair, without being noticed, and questioned, and sought after, and if possible ensnared. Do not think, thou who hast been made a living man by the quickening of the Holy Ghost, that thou canst glide through this world as the spiritually dead can do, for they may be quietly borne along to the place of corruption: the life within thee is too strange, too operative to be overlooked. Thou art a wonder unto many, and thou mayest well be so, for God hath wrought great marvels in thee and for thee. Beloved, ye are the Lord's witnesses, and witnesses must not skulk away in the background or remain dumb. When they bear their honest witness it is in open court, where they will be heard and regarded by all who are concerned in the suit, whether *pro* or *con.* Oh, saints of God, you are never unobserved; you are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and none of these

witnesses are indifferent to you: they all watch you with steady gaze to see how you run your race. The good are intent that you should so run as to obtain; and there are evil ones who long for your defeat. Solyma is addressed by urgent voices, who plead with her to return to them. For good or evil, multitudes of tongues cry to her, "Return, return, O Solyma: return, return."

Will you kindly notice from the connection of my text what state Solyma was in when these calls came to her? She was in her glory and beauty. In admiration the question is asked, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" A church or an individual Christian in a low state of grace may escape observation. Who cares about a dead church? Who fights with a lukewarm people? But if Jesus Christ be in the church, or in the heart, he will soon be seen. The evangelist tells us, "he could not be hid." You may slip down the street in the night without a candle, and like a thief you may pass by unobserved, but if the Lord has lighted your candle, and you bear it with you, the watchmen will notice you, the dogs will bark at you, and others will spy you out. As fire reveals itself, so also will grace. A bundle of lavender proclaims its own whereabouts by its fragrance, and so does the life of God in the soul. You may be sure that if the Lord of Hosts is with you, and in you, you will assuredly arouse the animosity of some, and the admiration of others. I pray that you and I may be in a bright, clear, forcible condition, as the bride was in this part of the Canticle; then shall we be sought after, and enquired about.

It appears that the church in her beauty had gone down to attend to her work. "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see

whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded." She did not sit down in the house to admire herself, nor go into the street to show herself: she went down into her Lord's garden to attend to her proper work, and then it was that they cried, "Return, return." Neither the world nor Christ himself will call much after us if we go forth to make displays of our own excellences. "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts," is a wretched piece of self-consciousness, which disgusts more than it attracts. A diligent life is an attractive life. Do thou, like an ant, work in thy season, carrying thy due burden upon the ant-hill, and if thou doest this for love of Jesus, thou doest nobly. Plod on without courting approbation, and rest content to do thine utmost for the common weal. In fellowship with thy Lord humbly do thy day's work in thy day. Seek not great things for thyself. Ask not to rule in the court, but be willing to work in the field; seek not to recline on the couch, but take thy pruning-knife, and go forth among the vines, to fulfil thine office, and in that self-forgetting service thy beauty shall be manifested, and voices shall salute thee, crying, "Return, return."

It appears, too, that while she was thus engaged, she was the subject of a great stir and emotion of heart. Perhaps she had felt dull and dreary till she entered on her work, but while she was busy with her pomegranates and her nuts, she cries, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." She felt that she could hasten like the chariots of a willing people, who rush to the fight from love of their prince. She felt as if she could run after her Beloved; she could leap, she could fly. Like a chariot that is drawn by Pharaoh's swiftest coursers, her spirit left all behind. Thus vigorous and active, she was watched by many

eyes, and soon she heard voices coming from the four quarters of the universe, crying, "Return, return, O Shulamith; return, return." I would, dear friends, that all Christians were what they should be. I am told, but I would not judge, that large numbers of professing people are only half alive, and are altogether asleep. If it be so, I wonder not that they are so inconsiderable in their influence. If they are neither diligent in their Master's business, nor fervent in spirit towards him, they are justly despised by those about them. If it be so with you, my brethren, you are losing the joy of Christian life when you might be filled with delight; you are poverty-stricken, where you might be rich; you are as beggars in the city where you are entitled to take up an honorable burgess-ship. May the Lord revive you! May he forgive your coldness, and set your souls on fire with love to Jesus! If you have life, may you now have it more abundantly! Doth not your Master desire that the feeblest of you may be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord? I speak to you who are the beloved of the Lord, to you who labor in holy service, to you who are quickened with a high degree of spiritual life, and feel your souls within you stirred with sacred enthusiasm. You are worth addressing: may the Holy Spirit make my address worthy of your attention! Let us use our text in two ways; may each one be profitable!

First, *she hears the lower voices that cry, Return, return, O Solyma: return, return,*" and she answers them with most conclusive negatives. Read the text another way, and in the second place, *she hears voices from above, which cry,* "*Return return, O Solyma: return, return,*" and she answers them by her actions as well as by her words.

I. Let us listen for a minute or two, but only with our ears, not with our hearts, to THE LOWER VOICES.

Whence come these voices? There are voices from the vasty deep of sin and hell, voices from the tombs which we have quitted, voices from the Egypt from which we have fled. They are crying evermore, like unquiet ghosts, "Return, return." Especially do they call to young souls, who are newly wedded to Jesus, in the hope that they have not as yet forgotten their own kindred and their father's house. When we have gone a long way in the divine life, the world feels dubious of our return, and almost gives us up, preferring rather to accuse than to invite. After many years of faithful service, and of resolute nonconformity to the world, many temptations which assaulted our youth are unknown to our maturity. The devil is not altogether a fool, although he is great in that direction; and therefore he does not continue for ever to use nets which have failed to entangle the birds. If he finds that cajolery will not ensnare us, he leaves his old tactics and tries other methods. When "Return, return" will not woo us, he puts on his lion form, and roars till the mountains shake. Upon young believers he very commonly uses very powerful inducements to go back. In the hope that he is dealing with Mr. Pliable, he exhibits the hardness of godliness and the pleasantness of sin, and draws the moral that they had better retrace their steps. To them he calls as sweetly as his cruel voice can tone itself, "Return, return, O Shulamith: return, return."

By *old companions* he does this. They say, "You have left us all, we do not know why. You have turned a fanatic; you have joined with gloomy Christian people, and you are not half the good fellow you used to be. Are you not getting a little tired of those dreary ways? Are not the rules of Christ too precise and Puritanic?

Are not the ways of God too self-denying? Is not godliness too holy and too heavenly for poor fallible beings like ourselves? If so, the door is open: we will welcome you back. It is true you rent yourself away and said that you must needs go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but we will not throw this in your teeth if you will give up such nonsense. Come, be a good fellow with us once more. We have not drunk up all the wine, nor broken all the viols. We are care-for-nothings still, and we shall be glad to make you as light-hearted as ourselves. You were a jolly fellow before you took those blues, and turned so squeamish: Come, shake it off, and be yourself again." How winningly they put it! How cleverly they mimic the tones of true friendship! One would think they sought our good, and were anxious to be our guardian angels.

Sometimes the desires of nature come to their help, and the tender passion is enlisted on the side of evil. Bright eyes and gentle lips speak to the natural heart, and plead with it to return. The tender love of women has thus played the tempter, and so has the strong affection of men. Courtesy and amiability cry, "Why do you fight so shy of us? You know what happy times we used to have together. Come, you have tried these Christian people and their faith; you must have found it very moping and melancholy: return and be merry once more. See how much more free we are than they; do not live by rule and order; return to the liberty of sin." Thus do her former comrades cry, "Return, return, O Solyma."

The *old joys* sometimes, in moments of weakness which will come upon us, revive upon the memory, and attempt to mislead us. I have known the young Christian remember what he once thought were joys, and

though he has clean left them, and hates them, yet in the distance which lends enchantment he does not notice so much of their shallowness, baseness, and brevity, and he thinks to himself, "In those days I laughed away the hours right merrily; life was light as a feather; in its froth and foam I saw rainbows of delight. Shall I try these things again? Was I not too hasty in renouncing them?" All the while the voices cry enchantingly, like the songs of the Sirens, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return." They bring out their most melodious music, and omit all discordant passages from the sonnet of life. They would have us hark back to what was once our joy. Oh, brothers, 'tis a wretched temptation, and yet some fall before it.

Do you not know how the world will even call us back to our *old cares?* We used to fret and worry until by God's grace we were led to try walking by faith, and then the Lord helped us to rest in his love, and wait patiently for him, and now perhaps for years we have had no burdens, for we have cast them on the Lord: we have gone in the morning, and told him the fears of the day, and at night we have had little else to do but to bless him for the mercy which has averted all those fears. We have lived in sweet content, rich in joyful expectation, and not poor even in present felicity; and now perhaps the world says, "You have spent too much of your money on religion; why did you not save it? You wasted a mint of your time upon furthering a kingdom which is imaginary. Oh, if you had given up those energies to the world, and stuck to your business, how much richer you might have been! Come now, quit those dreams, shun those prayer-meetings, leave that tiresome office in the Sunday-school, give up philanthropic speculations, and follow after your personal in-

terests, like a sensible man, you may get on then; if you mind the main chance you may rise in the social scale." There are times when steady, sober people, for whom the temptations of gaiety and vice have no charm at all, stand spell-bound by these more solid but equally degrading offers. Madame Bubble, as you know, offereth to the pilgrim her person, and there are many who turn with loathing from so vile a proffer; but then she also offereth her purse, and there are men like Mr. Standfast, who are as poor as an owlet, to whom that offer comes with dangerous force. Her voice has a shrill metallic ring, as she cries, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Return from generosity to selfishness, from holy zeal to worldliness and prudence. Seek that which all the nations of the world seek after, that which thou canst see with thine eyes, and enjoy with thy mouth." Many are these calls: I need not go into details, you will hear them soon enough. The Sirens are a numerous and ensnaring sisterhood.

When do these voices come? Their sound is heard full often. "Return, return, return, return,"—four times over the text hath it. They come so often that the word in the epistle to the Hebrews is more than justified, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." These opportunities come in our way everywhere, and at all times. If you wish to leave off being a Christian, if you wish to follow the world in its pleasures or in its labors, the doors are always open. It is a wonderfully forgiving world if you will but quit your protest against it. If we run away from our old master, and wish to return to his service, his yoke is always ready for our neck; he will never deny us employment, even though it be to feed swine.

Only too glad is the devil to pardon runaways. He is not ashamed to return with seven others to the house which he aforetime quitted. Often, often the child of God in his early days hears the entreaties of destroyers, as with all subtlety they plead, "Return, return, O Bride of Solomon; return, return."

At times these voices come from quarters to which our hearts lie open. Many a man hath been wooed from the ways of holiness by her that lay in his bosom. Samson had his Delilah. Oftener still, the professing Christian woman has been solicited to forsake her Lord by him who should have helped her in her noblest aspirations. Children have been misled by parents, friends by friends; for Satan hath many servitors, and many who do his bidding almost unwittingly. It is a fight to reach to heaven, and few there be to help us in it; but the path to hell is downward, and multitudes thrust out their hands to urge us to the infernal deeps. These cries are borne to us by every gale, in tones both loud and gentle, "Return, return."

And, dear brethren, we shall find that they solicit us in our best moments. I cannot fully account for the fact, but so it is, that I am most liable to speak unadvisedly with my lips when I have just enjoyed the raptures of high fellowship with God. Yonder shines the Mountain of Transfiguration in its unrivalled splendor; but lo, at the very foot of it the devil rages in the lunatic child! Our highest graces are not to be trusted, for, as the most venomous serpents lurk among the brightest flowers, so are temptations most abundant hard by our most spiritual and heavenly joys. Trust not thyself, O child of God, when thou hast seen the invisible, when thou hast stood within the circle of fire, and spoken with God as only his favorites may! Think not thyself secure

when thou comest down into thy worldly business, though thou hast bathed thy forehead in the serene light of communion. As pirates distinctly aim to attack the most heavily-laden galleons, so will Satan assail thee when thy vessel has just left the Gold Coast of meditation and prayer. Therefore, watch thou, and pray evermore. That detestable voice, which dared to ask the Master himself to fall down and worship Satan, will come to thee when thou art most bright and shining with the glory of hallowed fellowship, and it will whisper to thee, "Return, return. Come down from the mount, and break the commandments to shivers at its foot." The fiend will call thee Solyma, quoting thy heavenly name —that name of peace and love—and yet he will dare to say, "Return, return." He will flatter us for our virtues, and yet tempt us to the worst of vices. Get thee behind me, Satan. Avaunt, foul fiend! Even when repulsed he will return to the charge, crouch at our feet, and whine out still, "Return, return." The treasures of Egypt, and the pleasures of sin, are his bait and bribe. We cannot and will not return at his bidding, yet his frequent solicitation puts us to a stand, and makes us cry for help.

Notice that our text goes on to say *why they wish us to return.* "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." And is that all? Am I to be a traitor to my Lord, and quit his holy ways, and forfeit heaven, to be made a show of by thee, O Satan? or by thee O world? Is this a full reward for treachery—"that we may look upon thee?" Why, their looks are daggers. As the eyes of basilisks are the eyes of the ungodly world; as malignant stars that blast the soul. Whenever you long for ungodly men to see your piety, your piety will wither beneath their glance. Remember how that ex-

pression of looking upon Zion is sometimes used in Scripture; in Micah iv. 11 we have it—"Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." They wished to spy out her sorrows and weaknesses, that they might jest at her, and grieve her: these enemies will do the same with you if you give them the opportunity. Trust a wolf at your throat sooner than worldly men in religious matters. They cannot mean you good, nor do you good should they mean it. They will draw you out and then expose you, they will entice you into sin and then report your faults. When the world loves the holy man it is the love of the vulture for the sick lamb. Fear you the worldling, even when he bears you gifts.

Now hear *Solyma's wise answer to her tempters.* She says, "What will ye see in Solyma?" Dost thou ask me, O world, to come back and show myself to be thy friend? Dost thou promise me approbation? Dost thou vow to look upon me, and admire me, and take me for an example? What is there in me that thou canst approve of? What wilt thou see in Solyma? What can the world see in a believer? The world knoweth us not, because it knew Christ not. A blind man wants to see me: I need not go far to oblige him, for he will get but little out of it if I yield to his request. What a vain reason,—"That we may look upon thee!" They are so blind they cannot even see themselves, nor know that they are blind. What have you and I to do with them? No, let us walk in the light, and have fellowship with God, and then our life shall be hid with Christ in God, only to be manifested when our Lord is manifested; and we shall be well content to have it so. Listen, O blind world, while we tell you what you would see if we did come to you. "What will ye see in Solyma?"

You would see—we grieve to say it—a conflict within us: "As it were the company of two armies." You would see two things in us; and yet neither would give you satisfaction. There is sin in us; but inasmuch as it grieves us to have it there we will not show it you. We do not wish to make mirth for the daughter of Babylon, and when her children ask us to make music for them by singing one of the songs of Zion, we answer, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" If we must tell you what you would see in us, we will confess our faultiness, but warn you that out of this you would get but little joy. You would see two armies, it is true, but neither of them would yield to you. You would see in us a nature like your own; but it is mortified, kept under, and laid under condemnation. It would give you no great pleasure to see it, for we reckon it to be dead. The dead are poor company. There is in us, it is true, a capacity for all your worldly joys; but the world is crucified to us, and we are crucified unto the world. There is in us a capacity for all your merriment, but if we were forced to be with you we should be dreadful kill-joys to you; you would wonder that we did not laugh when you laugh at sin, and that we should not be as ready as you are to run into excess of riot. We should soon weary you, for the Lord has said, "I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people." You would say by and by, "Let these slow souls begone: they hinder our mirth." If we came among you as we are, it would happen with us ere long as it did with Israel, for "Egypt was glad when they departed." Our nature that is like your nature is put under restraint, and dies daily, and its expiring groans would be sorry music in your ears.

Then, do you know we have another army in us?

That is, there is a new life in us; that life is the indwelling Spirit of God, as it is written, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." If we did return at your request, if we came in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, with the Holy Spirit indwelling our bodies, and making them his temples, you would not know what to make of us, and consequently you would scoff at us, as Ishmael did at Isaac, or envy us as his brethren envied Joseph. You would be sure to ridicule us, for you would not understand us, and therefore you would count us hypocrites and sanctimonious fools. As well might oxen commune with men as the wicked with the godly. We have a life beyond you and above you, into which you cannot enter. We are sorry for you that you will not receive the heavenly life which is in Christ Jesus, but as you have it not, we cannot make you our confidants or associates. You would grieve us, and we should provoke you; and therefore we are best apart. You say, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return, that we may look upon thee," and our only answer must be, "What would ye see in Solyma?" Nothing but that which would rebuke and anger you: you would see a company of two armies, both fighting against you.

Come, young brothers and sisters, you that have been tempted to go back; you cannot even tolerate the thought. You have burned your boats behind you, and must conquer or die. Like one of old, you say, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." To go back were to give the lie to the word of God, to make God himself false, to tell the worldling that there are, after all, no pleasures in Christ like the pleasures of the world; it would be to spit in your Saviour's face, to play the Judas, to sell Christ for pieces of money, or for the filthy lusts of this present evil world. Go back! It

were to renounce heaven and all its glories; it were to choose a terrible death-bed, with a guilty conscience ringing the knell of your soul; it were to choose eternal banishment from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power. You cannot return; you cannot even look back. If thou art a true Shulamith, thou wilt not even deliberate for a moment about it, but flinging thyself into the Beloved's arms, thou wilt cry, "Lord, to whom should I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." God help you so to do, for Jesus' sake. That is the first part of our subject.

II. Now we turn to listen, not with our ears only, but with our hearts too, to the call of THE HIGHER VOICES which cry, "Return, return." Brethren, to go to heaven, to go to Christ, to go towards holiness, is a return to God's people: for God's people are originally his children. Though they are prodigals, and have gone into a far country, they always were his children; even when they spent their substance in riotous living they were still his sons, and each of them could speak of "My Father's house." To come to Christ, and holiness, and heaven, is to return. Besides, all God's people have a new life put into them. Whence came that new life but from heaven and God? Therefore to go towards God is for the quickened ones to return. All God's people are bound for heaven; it is in their charter-party that they should sail for heaven, and therefore to heaven they must go. When the Israelites came out of Egypt to go to Canaan they were not going to a strange land, they were returning to what had always been their inheritance according to the covenant; they were going out of the house of bondage, and they were returning to the land that flowed with milk and honey, where their fathers had sojourned before them. Now, to-day, as a

child of God, I can hear voices out of the yet beyond, ringing out of the glory, and crying to me, "Return, return." My Father is in heaven; my Saviour is on the throne; many brethren have gone before; all my heart is with my treasure, therefore I hear the shining ones crying to me every day, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return!" Every harp in the heavenly choir is ringing out an invitation to all the Lord's beloved; every palm-bearing hand is beckoning to us; every glorified lip is calling us to come up higher.

To return, I think, means this—come nearer to Christ, nearer to God, nearer to holiness. You are saved; seek to be like your Saviour. You did enjoy splendid days at first, in the love of your espousals; return to them; walk always in the light as God is in the light. You were once in the banqueting-house, and the banner over you was love: return to that house of fellowship. Every day seek to lose yourself more in Christ, to live more completely in him, by him, for him, with him. Return, return, to greater heights of holiness, to deeper self-denial, to braver service, to intenser love, to more burning zeal, to more of the Godlike and the Christlike. Return, return. The holiest and the best call us that way. Every saint in heaven cries, "Return"; every child of God on earth who is full of the inner life entreats us to return; and chiefly, that dear voice, which once for us cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is always calling to us, "Return, return." Oh, how sweetly doth he use the name himself did give us, our marriage name! Hear him beseech us, "O Solyma, my best beloved, return, return, and come to me!" These are the higher voices.

Notice that in the text that word "return" is put four times over. Is it not because it is of the highest impor-

tance that every child of God should keep returning, and coming nearer to the Father's house? Is it not because it is our highest joy, our strongest security, our best enrichment, to be always coming to Christ as unto a living stone, and getting into closer fellowship with him? As he calls four times, is it not a hint that we are slow to come? We ought to come to Jesus not only at his first call, but even at the glances of his eyes, when he looks as though he longed for our love: it ought to be our rapture to think only of him, and live wholly to him; but as we fail to answer to first pleas, he cries four times, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Come to thine own Husband, thine own loving Lord." He ceases not to entreat until we do return. Do not the reduplications of this call hint at his strong desire after us, his condescending love for us? It does seem so wonderful to me that Christ should want our fellowship, but he does: he cannot be happy without us. Still he sitteth down upon the well when he is thirsty, and looking across to Samaria's fallen daughter he says to her, "Give me to drink." His people are his fulness; he cannot be filled if they are away: I dared not have said this if the Holy Ghost had not declared it, but it is true. Without his people Jesus would be a Head without a body, and that is a ghastly object; a King without subjects, and that would have been a wretched parody of royalty; a Shepherd without sheep, and that would have been a dolorous office, having many pains but no reward. Jesus must have us, or he is a Bridegroom without a bride, bereaven and barren. Oh, how he loves us! How he longs for communion with us! Shall he stand and cry, "Return, return," and will we not come to him at once? Hear him again in another way. He knocks at our door and he cries, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my

undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Will we not admit him? If he seeks our company, and therefore calls us to return, our spirit bursts her fetters, she is ashamed of the bonds that hold her on the right and on the left. She cries "Let me go; I must be with my Lord; his voice compels me. My soul would leap out of the body rather than not come to him who cries, 'Return, return, return, return.'"

I have shown you why the call is so oft repeated. Do you not think it is a very instructive call? Permit me to put it thus: "Return," that is, to your first simple faith. If you have risen to greatness of conceit and pride of knowledge, return to your humble thoughts. Shrink to nothing again in the presence of your God. Come to the cross as you came at first, saying,—

> "I the chief of sinners am,
> But Jesus died for me."

Return to your first loving intercourse with Christ, for then the days were only bright with his presence, and the night watches were not weary while you could commune with him. Return to the happy love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after him into the wilderness, for those were halcyon days. Return, return, to your first ardor in service. Nothing was too hot, or too heavy for you then; you were impetuous to be engaged in seeking his redeemed. You have grown lazy now, and you think service for God too severe a strain upon you. Return to your first diligence in joyous service. Return also to your eagerness for holy growth. Then you desired to have the best that God could give you: in those days you resolved to be a thorough Christian; not barely to live, but to live unto God in the highest

degree. Return unto that, and aspire after more. If you have left the best form of consecration, return to it. Oh, sea, rise once more to high-water mark, if thou hast turned to ebb! Oh, soul, come back to the highest thou hast ever attained or longed for! As the eagle cries, "higher"; as the river crieth, "fuller"; as the day crieth, "brighter"; so let it be with thee. Thou are married to him whose blood has bought thee, and he cannot, will not be in heaven without thee; therefore, hasten to obey while he saith to thee, "Return, return!"

I beg you to observe what the spouse has to say to this when she is thus called upon to return to the Lord. The Lord saith to her, "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." Is not that a reason for coming back? The Lord says, "That I may look upon thee. He desires your society, and seems gently to hint that you have kept aloof from him. He seems to say,—"You have not been much with me alone lately, you have neglected the reading of the word, and the hearing of it; I have scarcely seen thy face; therefore return, that I may look upon thee." Cover your face and say, "Lord, why shouldst thou look on me? I am full of sin"; but then draw near to him, that his look of love may bring thee to repentance, and cause thy sin to pass away. Remember he hath power in his eyes to look thee into purity and beauty. Come and say, "Look upon me, Lord; search me, try me, and know my ways." Return, that with infinite pity thy Beloved may see what aileth thee, and then with his dear pierced hand may perform a divine surgery upon thee, and make thee well again.

"Return, that we may look upon thee." I think I may use the phrase to express also that intense satisfaction which Jesus has in every believer. With what pleasure the mother looks upon her child: she remem-

bereth no more the travail for joy that a man is born into the world; but with infinitely greater satisfaction doth Christ see of the travail of his soul in every believer. You ought to show yourselves to Jesus, you have cost him so much: he has loved you even to the death, and loves you still, you ought to abide with him. Return to him that he may look upon you.

And I think, too, when we live near to him, and get into fellowship with him, Jesus feels a sweet complacency towards us. Oh dear parents, you know the pleasure you have in your loving children; if they have been away from you for years, what a satisfaction it is again to see them within your doors; there is no sight like it! Your Lord loves you so much that it gives him profound pleasure, it swells his heaven to the brim to see you living in his love. What must be his grief when you go fussing about the world, and have no time to talk with him; when you go out sporting and mixing with his enemies, and say that you have no leisure to commune with him! You give delight to him who is Immanuel, God with us, when you frequently approach him, or constantly abide with him. You make him glad with your secret devotion, your heart's affection, your holy boldness, your all-absorbing zeal. Oh, do come to your Lord that he may look upon you!

Did I hear you bashfully say, "What will ye see in Solyma? If Jesus looks on such a dead dog as I am, what will he see in me? I am so full of evil." He will see in you that which delights him. He will see his own work there, yea, he will see himself there. Did you never see the sun reflected in a little splinter of glass? The mirror was scarcely an inch in diameter, yet you saw the heavens in it. Have you never looked upon a bubble blown by a school-boy's pipe, and seen a thousand

rainbows in it? When the Lord looks on his people, he sees the reflection of himself: he can see himself in our eyes, and therefore those eyes charm him so that he cries, "Thou has ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou has ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." The infinite love there is between Christ and us makes him see no sin in Jacob, neither iniquity in Israel; but he looks until he exclaims, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." Be not ashamed to return to your Lord, for he lovingly urges thee to do so. Let your heart and your flesh, like two armies, welcome him, let all your inward conflict aim at coming near to him. Rest not till, like Jacob's two bands, you are altogether under the blessing of the covenant angel.

I will turn my text about a little, and give you another rendering, which will suit the heart which is welcoming its Lord. Our Mahanaim, our meeting of hosts, shall not be for war, now that the Lord invites us like Jacob to return to the land of milk and honey; but the companies shall be as musical as they are martial. There are within our experiences companies of singing soldiers, choirs of camps. The text exhibits the warring soul, triumphant in her Lord, and meeting him with timbrel and harp.

> "Spouse of Christ, in arms contending,
> Though thy battle-course must run;
> Yet with prayers for help ascending,
> Shout thy praise for triumphs won."

Oh, if my Lord will come and meet me, he shall see in me whole choirs of songsters! My heart, like Miriam, shall take a timbrel, and all my powers, like the daughters of Israel, shall follow, dancing and singing with glad

accord. On the high-sounding cymbals my heart shall play, singing,—"His own right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory. Glory! Glory! Where he cometh glory dwelleth." When shall I come into his presence, and behold my God, my exceeding joy? Then will I praise him with body and soul, with heart and with voice. His coming with all his perfections, and my coming with all my desires, shall make a Mahanaim; and the two hosts, once met, shall encamp together, guarding the King's pavilion, which glitters in the midst. Then shall the warriors become minstrels, and the soldiers shall be singers, as in the valley of Berachah, where all the people triumphed, and they returned to Jerusalem playing upon harps, and Psalteries, and trumpets.

Here I leave you in the joyful presence of the King. We cannot cease speaking at a higher point. The Lord keep us in his presence, for his love's sake. Amen.

II.

THE ROCKY FORTRESS AND ITS INHABITANT.

February 3, 1884.

"He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."—ISAIAH xxxiii. 15, 16.

THERE were terrible times in Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. The Assyrian power was exceedingly formidable, and it was ferocious to the last degree. Woe to the unhappy land which fell under the power of this spoiler. Assyria knew not the meaning of "mercy;" it came down "like a wolf on the fold," rending and devouring without pity. The armies of Sennacherib were ravaging the kingdom of Judah, and they had brought it into such a state that the prophet cried, "The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits." Before the invaders the land was a garden, and behind them it was a desolate wilderness. Yet the Lord had given a promise to his people in Jerusalem on this wise: "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord." Not-

withstanding Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter, and all his foul revilings, those who trusted in Jehovah were not dismayed; for the Lord had promised to defend the city for his own name's sake.

There were godly men in the city, I fear there were not many, who rested content with the sure promise of God, and went about their daily business feeling perfectly safe. They would have felt secure if the whole land had swarmed with Assyrians as the fields with locusts, for they believed the word of the Lord. Their trust was in the living God, and therefore they feared not the multitude of the enemy. But the whole of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not of this brave order: the unholy were afraid, fearfulness surprised the hypocrites. Their sin and their deceit made cowards of them. They would all be destroyed, they would all perish by the Assyrians! Who was to save them? What power could resist the conqueror of nations? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arphad? The people of those cities had trusted in their gods, and yet none of them had been delivered out of the hand of the invader: how could Jehovah turn back the fierce tyrant now that he had come upon the land like a flood?

The sinners and the hypocrites in the time of trial were discovered: the sinners showed their fear, and the hypocrites manifested their unbelief. They began to flee before they were pursued: they trembled though no foeman could be seen from the walls. God in vengeance was come near to the city, the land smoked with all-consuming fire, the flame of the Lord's indignation burned perpetually—how could these men hope to live in such times? As well hope to live amid devouring fires and everlasting burnings. Alas, there are many who dwell among God's people at this day, and have a name

and a place among them who are sinners and not saints, hypocrites and not believers; and these will before long be discovered and dismayed. While all goes well with the church of God you cannot separate the vile from the precious, nor pluck up the tares from among the wheat, nor cast out the bad fish from among the good, which are enclosed in the same net. But trying times come, and days of adversity, and then the false brethren are discerned. When persecution arises the hypocrites are offended, when affliction rushes like a torrent the sand-founded houses fall; and especially shall it be so when amid the terrors of the last tremendous day every secret thing shall be revealed, and hypocrites and sinners shall appear in their true colors. Fearfulness will leap unexpectedly upon the hypocrites to their intense surprise, for they will see how impossible it is for them to dwell with God and to abide his holy presence. Oh, dear brethren, let us not be satisfied with being in Zion, or in the church; let us not rest till we are quite sure that we are not sinners in it, that we are not hypocrites in it: for, mark you, if our religion is not sanctifying and true it will fail us in the hour of trial. If our confidence in God does not make us calm and hopeful in the time of temptation and sorrow, what is the use of it? Yet it is certain that no man shall find his profession to be of use to him in testing times but he that is true in it, he that is thorough in it, he that is neither a sinner nor a hypocrite in the sense in which those words are here used. Safety in Zion belongs to those born in her by regeneration, reared in her by sanctification, enfranchised in her by faith in the Son of God, settled in her by fixed principles, confirmed in her by obedience to her laws, and bound to her by intense love of her king and her citizens. Such "shall dwell on high" secure

from danger, and only such: the aliens and foreigners within her gates shall ere long be driven forth with shame.

We are going to look this morning at these favored people: first to *note their character;* secondly, to *observe their security;* and to finish, thirdly, by stirring up all present to *seek their felicity.* Oh, for the aid of the Holy Spirit all the sermon through!

I. First, let us NOTE THEIR CHARACTER.

They are described in part in the words of our text, but I am obliged to go a little further afield for one essential part of their character. The true people of God who in the time of danger will be preserved are a people *who display a humble, patient, present faith in God.* They reveal their character in the second verse of the chapter before us when they pray—"O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." They humbly cry, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They are a praying people, who make their appeal to God under a sense of need: they are not fatalists, for they pray, neither are they self-sufficient, for they seek help of God. They beseech the Lord to bless them not according to their own merit but according to his grace. Though their outward life has been cleansed, and their hearts are renewed, yet they do not imagine that they have any claim upon God, but their appeal is to his free favor: "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They are not a people who think that God will be gracious necessarily, and that, therefore, they need not pray for mercy, for they are found crying to him in earnest prayer. They are, you see, a trustful people, who feel that they have need, and that their need can only be fulfilled by the sovereign grace of God, to whom they make supplica-

tion. Those who dwell on high with God are always lovers of grace: it is the top and bottom of their hope.

Furthermore, they are a waiting people: "We have waited for thee." If the Lord does not seem to hear their prayer at once, they nevertheless expect that he will do so; and, therefore, they wait expectantly. If at once they have not all the comfort and joy they would desire, they tarry God's pleasure, not rushing into sin to snatch a hasty rescue, nor running away at the first rebuff and saying, "What profit is there if we wait upon him?" Quite certain that the Lord does hear prayer, and that he waiteth to be gracious, they hopefully abide his time, for his appointments are ever wise.

They are a people who have a present faith, which they exercise every day, saying, "Be thou their arm every morning! They do not imagine that by having trusted in God years ago, they have obtained salvation, and therefore may now live without faith; but they believe to-day as they believed from the beginning of their Christian life, and so prove it true that "the just shall live by his faith." Every step they are depending, every morning they are looking up to the hills whence cometh their help. These are the true people of God, and the only people of God:—trusting, hoping, expecting, relying and resting upon the Lord their God. The fear of the Lord is their treasure, and they cry with exultation in the language of the twenty-second verse, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us." The description in our actual text is the portrait of their outer life: but a living faith is the secret basis and foundation of it all.

This being understood, our text gives a description of these people, setting out their various features. It first describes *their feet*, or how they walk: "He that

walketh righteously." Faith has an effect upon our entire manhood. When a man believes, his faith affects every part of him; it operates upon his actions, thoughts, wishes, and designs; and it affects both his private and public life. One of the first evidences of a true belief in God is that a man walks righteously. He tries to act rightly towards his God and towards his fellow-men; and thus he is led to be devout before the Lord, and upright among men. The rule of right is the rule for him; not policy, nor the hope of gain, nor the desire to please, much less the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. By the grace of God he labors above all things to walk in the narrow way of true holiness. I want you to notice this, because the promise I am going to speak about belongs only to the people who answer to this description; therefore, see you to it, that you do not take the comfort of the promise if you come not under the character to whom that comfort is given. The man who does not walk righteously shall not dwell on high; there shall be no place of defence for him. If we depart from the ways of righteousness, and run in the paths of the wicked, we shall meet with the same fate as they. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Where the grace of God truly dwells, and a living faith is in exercise, the man becomes righteous in his walk and conversation; and his course is more and more conformed to the will of the Lord. I deny that a man is a believer in the Lord Jesus if he remains a dishonest man; I deny that he has real faith in Jesus Christ if he is rotten in heart, unjust in business, and untrue in life. He knows not Christ who delights in iniquity. So you see that the first description of this blessed man who is to dwell on high is very searching, for it does not relate to his pro-

fession, but to his walk and conversation from day to day. It is not talk, but action that we have here. Here is no room for the fiction of formality, all is fact, fact of daily life.

The next feature that is described is *his tongue*—"he speaketh uprightly." No description of a man's character can be perfect which does not include his speech. A man who lies, or who talks obscenely or profanely is a bad man! A man whose words are arrogant and boastful, cruel and slanderous, unreliable and deceptive, unchaste and impure, is no child of God. The grace of God very speedily sweetens a man's tongue, and if his religion does not operate upon his speech, surely it is not the religion of the pure and holy God. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." If the tongue be set on fire of hell the heart is not on fire with grace from heaven. The doctor says, "Put out your tongue," and he judges the symptoms of health or disease thereby; assuredly, there is no better test of the inward character than the condition of the tongue. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee" is a fair decision. If, then, our lips do not speak uprightly, that is, speak truthfully and justly, if our tongue is not salted and sanctified by the grace of God, then we cannot claim any of the privileges which are described in our text. God grant that we may prove by our conversation that the Lord has renewed us in our inner man.

The next feature is *the heart*—"he that despiseth the gain of oppressions." Not only does he not oppress any man, nor wish to gain anything by extortion or by grinding the faces of the poor, or by any act of unrighteousness; but he thinks such gain as might be made in that fashion to be utterly contemptible—he despises it. He desires

gain if it may come cleanly to him, prosperity is as welcome to him as to another man, for he has his own needs and the needs of his household for which he is bound to provide; but if any should say to him that there is gold to be gotten through pinching the laborer in his wages, or through grasping by law that which is not morally his own, he abhors the thought. He says of such gain, "I would not win it if I could: I would not put such evil money amongst my honest earnings: it would pollute all the rest of my substance." A good man is jealous lest he should seem to receive the wages of unrighteousness. He desires to receive his goods as blessings at the hands of God, and not to win them as a spoil from the oppressed. A true Christian would not bring into his house a thing over which he could not seek the blessing of God; he would count it a thing accursed like Achan's wedge of gold. Many ways of making money which are tolerated nowadays would be loathsome to a right-minded man. Though unrighteous practices should promise to fill his house with silver and gold, he would not follow them; he could not sell his Lord for pieces of silver. He despises the gain of oppression; it is as the mire of the streets to him; he looks down upon it with utter contempt. Dear friends, it little matters what our outward life may be, or even what our speech may be, if our heart is not affected by our religion. If grace only lies skin-deep in thee, it has only saved thy skin, but not thy soul. Until grace touches the main-spring, it has done nothing to purpose: the heart must despise evil, as well as the lips denounce it. Until the well-head is sweetened, the streams are foul. Not only must I do right, but love right; not only must I avoid wrong, but I must hate wrong; not only must I refuse unrighteous gain, but I must utterly de-

spise it. See, my brethren, how much is needful ere any one of us can claim the choice blessings which are spread before us in the second part of our text.

The portrait does not omit *the hands*, those important members of the body—those prominent actors both for good and for evil. In Isaiah's days bribery was connected with every government office high and low; but the good man "shaketh his hands from holding of bribes." If money was slipped into his hand before he was aware of it, he shook it off with indignation. He would not take what was offered or keep what was given. There is much of bribery abroad still; in indirect ways men are offered advantages if they will wink at evil, or frown on good. Satan tempts young and old with the old insinuation, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The Destroyer still makes merchandise of souls. Oh, for grace to shake off every sort of bribe from our hands as men shake off dust from their feet with utter abhorrence when their indignation is aroused. Clean hands are as needful as renewed hearts. If your hands clutch the reward of a sinful trade, or a dishonest transaction, or if you hold a profit by countenancing wrong, or forbearing from right, you are not among the people whom the Lord has sworn to guard with his own right hand.

Thus we have described the feet, the tongue, the heart, and the hand. Now comes *the ear*,—"that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood." Men who delighted in war in olden time were apt to regale one another with their cruel deeds,—whom they slew, and how they slew them: they rolled the dainty morsels of cruelty under their tongues. In Hezekiah's times, I warrant, tales were told blood-red with horror that would have made our ears to tingle, and these were greedily listened to by

those of a coarse spirit; but the good man in Jerusalem would not hear them. When a man boasted of having slain such an enemy the godly man said, "Go, tell your tale somewhere else, lest I bring you before the judge. I will not hear of your wicked doings; I cannot endure your brutal talk." He shut his ears, he drew back from the discourse, it was sickening to him. Now it is not the hearing of blood alone that you and I must avoid, but the hearing of anything that is tainted, prurient, sceptical, depraving. This has much to do with the health of a genuine Christian's soul—that he puts an embargo upon unclean conversation, counts it contraband, and will not allow it to enter his soul by the gate of the ear. He wisely shuts the gate, lets down the portcullis, and pulls up the drawbridge, so that no filthy communication may come in by Ear-gate. The same sacred prudence prevents our reading books which are corrupt, or false. As soon as we reach a page which has an ill savor about it, we drop the volume and return it to its owner; or if it is our own we cast it into the fire that it may do no harm to others. The righteous man "shutteth his ear." He will not be interested in that which cannot subserve his highest interest. He is not willing to be like the king in the story, poisoned through the ear. He knows that an ill tale cannot injure him if he never hears it, and therefore he denies his curiosity that he may keep his memory undefiled. He is deaf to news about which a good man would be dumb. He has the blood upon his ear, to signify that his Lord has bought him with a price in that member, as well as in every other; yea, his ear is bored to the doorpost of truth, that he may hear it, and it only, with full intent of heart.

The picture is complete when *the eyes* are mentioned

—"he shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." He cannot help seeing it as he goes along his pilgrimage through life; but he seeks not such a sight, and as much as he can he avoids it. He takes no pleasure in the most brilliant displays of folly. Vain pomps and glories charm him not. He does not seek his amusement in gazing upon bedizened wickedness. If there be a turmoil in the street he is not the man that will be called as a witness to it, for he discreetly walks the other way, leaving off strife before it be meddled with. He is one that does not leap into the ditch in the hope that he may come out of it without being covered with mire; but he chooses the clean path, and keeps out of harm's way. When others crave to see life, he judges such life to be death, and pursues a nobler path. He wishes to see only that which is good, and true, and helpful to his progress to heaven. Opened eyes and ears are good, but sometimes closed eyes and stopped ears are better. You know the old classic story of how Ulysses caused his sailors to pass the rocks of the Sirens in safety. The sweet enchanting song of the fatal sisters would have fascinated the mariners, and drawn them upon the rocks, and so the crafty Ulysses sealed the ears of all his mariners with wax, lest the sweet deluders should destroy them.

> "Then every ear I barr'd against the strain,
> And from access of frenzy lock'd the brain."

To be blind and deaf and dumb in some places would be far better than to hear and see and speak to our own condemnation: better infinitely to enter into life halt or blind or deaf, than, having all our powers, to use them to sinful purposes, and fall into hell fire at last.

Shortly, the text means just this, that a true believer

is a man who has himself well in hand, having mastery over his whole manhood. He has a bit in the mouth of all the steeds which draw the chariot of life, and he holds them under due control. He will not let his ear or his eye delude his fancy, nor his foot or hand deface his conduct, nor his heart or tongue betray his spirit: he will have nought to do with evil, he has no fellowship with it, his spirit is redeemed, regenerated, renewed. He will not be flattered into pride, nor bribed into deceit, nor allured into unholiness. The Holy Spirit has wrought in him a holy spirit, and integrity and uprightness preserve him.

The true Christian is a man who keeps himself clear of the common sins of the age, the popular vices which flourish uncondemned. The sins mentioned in the text were those current in Jerusalem: there they oppressed the poor, they ground them down in their rents, in their wages, in the price of food, in the usury demanded for loans; there they took bribes, and sold Justice; but the good man did not so because of the fear of the Lord. In Jerusalem men-at-arms gained wealth by deeds of blood and violence; they devoured widows' houses, and ate up the inheritance of the fatherless: but so did not the child of God. He was out of the fashion. Gainful sins were to him most accursed: he would rather suffer wrong than inflict it. David sketched this man in his twenty-fourth Psalm, and with this I give a finishing stroke to the portrait:—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

II. We have reached our second head. I ask you to

follow me while, concerning these godly men, we OBSERVE THEIR SECURITY.

Observe it, first, *as it is pictorially described* in the text, the times are those of war: the battle rages in the plain, but "he shall dwell on high"; aloft upon the craggy rocks shall be his citadel. In times of invasion men resorted to the highest mountains and rocks, that there they might be sheltered among the lofty fastnesses. While others flee, this man shall dwell—dwell at ease, in permanent peace; and that dwelling shall be on the heights, far beyond the reach of the invader. Is not this glorious? The bands of robbers ravage all around, but they cannot plunder *him;* he looks down upon them and defies their power. There upon the inaccessible rock stands the city of peace, its quiet walls gleaming in the sunlight, and flashing back a calm defiance to the foe. "Mark ye well her bulwarks." A believer dwells on the heights, his life is hid with Christ in God, he cannot be reached by the darts of the adversary.

"Yet," saith one, "though he dwell on high, the enemy may reach him by scaling-ladders, or by some other means of assault." By no means shall they smite him, for he shall have a "place of defence." Is it not written, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge"? "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." As a castle prepared for war, as "the tower of David builded for an armory," so shall the Lord be unto his people. The adversary shall rage in vain, dashing himself against ramparts which he cannot shake; he shall go round the city like a dog, but find no entrance, for the Lord is there.

"Yet," crieth one, "these walls may be dashed down, or may fall into decay." Not so, for "his place of de-

fence shall be the munitions of rocks." Stupendous rock, firm, massive, enormous, shall furnish him a hiding-place. Immutable strength shall gird him around both by day and by night for ever and ever. "His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." Not one fortification, but many shall make up his stronghold: mountains shall be round about him, the solid foundations of the earth shall stand between him and the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt him.

"Munitions of stupendous rock
His dwelling-place shall be,
There might his soul without a shock
The wreck of nature see."

"Yet," saith one, "the enemy may starve a man out of his citadel: rock cities have been captured at last because the inhabitants have been pinched with hunger." There has been nothing for the men-at-arms to eat, and therefore they have sold their castle for bread. But this also is provided for: "His bread shall be given him." God will take care that the godly shall not want. As the Lord's chosen cannot be driven out, so they shall not be starved out. The believer shall hold the fort till Christ shall come, for the bread of angels shall be rained upon him sooner than he shall lack.

"Ah, well," saith one, "but even if bread could be conveyed into the fortress, yet you know these elevated positions cannot be readily supplied with water, and by thirst they may be forced to yield." The promise has thought of that also, for it is written, "his waters shall be sure." The well within the gate shall never fail, the hidden springs shall never be dried, and the people of the city shall drink and drink as much as they will, and yet the supply shall never be exhausted. O thou enemy,

let thy hopeless warfare end! Give up the conflict, for vainly dost thou beleaguer the city of God! The chosen of the Lord shall never be conquered by the foe, for his God hath taken measures to garrison him against all assaults and to deliver him in all straits.

Do you remind me that all this is poetry? I answer, it is a poetical description, but it is true in every jot and tittle, and so I ask you to accompany me while we consider this thing *as it may be actually experienced.*

It is a matter of fact that the man who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lives as a Christian should live, dwells on the heights. His mind is lifted up above the common cares, and worries, and vexations of life. The Holy Spirit has begotten him again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and therefore his conversation is in heaven; from whence he looks for his Saviour the Lord Jesus. I am sure that many of you know what it is to ride on the high places of the earth, and to look down upon the world as a poor, paltry thing. You have walked with God in light, even as he is in the light, and then you have been filled with a joy which no man taketh from you, and you have trodden the world beneath your feet, and all that earth calls good or great. Thus has it been true of you, "he shall dwell on high."

You have also found that you have had a place of defence in time of trouble. Though often assailed you have never been really injured; unto this day the rage of man has caused you no real loss. You can understand today the meaning of that word, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Even Satan himself has not been able to overthrow you: you have trodden upon the lion and the dragon: in the name of the

Lord you have resisted the devil, and he has fled from you. Tell it out this day to all the sons of men, that the Lord thy God has been a wall of fire round about thee. I also will join thee in this glorying. "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" All things have worked together for good to us up till now, and we know it; we have had a place of defence, and in this we will rejoice to be glad.

And do you not know to-day how secure, how immutable is your defence? Even as the eagle on the rock cannot be reached by the fowler, so are you secure. Look! You have God's promise—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!" "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." These promises are the munitions of rocks behind which you are sheltered; the sure words of an unchanging God are your bulwarks. You have also the oath of God as your high tower: for he has sworn by himself because he could swear by no greater. There stands his covenant made up of promises, secured by oath, and ratified by blood: who shall break within that line of defence? What munitions of rock can be compared with these things in which it is "impossible for God to lie,"—these pledges which God can never dishonor, these guarantees of everlasting faithfulness that can never be questioned. Oh, the blessed security of a child of God!

At this present moment, O child of God, you are dwelling where you must be safe; for, first, you were chosen before the foundation of the world, and God will not loose his choice, nor shall his decree be frustrated. Next, you have been bought with the precious blood of the Son of God himself, and he will never lose what he has so dearly bought. You have been quickened by the Holy Ghost, and such a life can never die. You know

who hath said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." You have been taken into the family of God, and made his child; and will your Father now disown you, or remove your name out of the family register? You are also joined unto Christ in one spirit, you are a "member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," and shall Christ be dismembered, and the Son of God be rent in twain? Believing in my Lord this morning I stand where the devils of hell cannot reach me, and where the angels of God might envy me; for I can exclaim in your name and in my own, "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" We challenge earth and hell, time and eternity, to dissolve the blessed union between Christ and his people. Who is he that can harm you if you be followers of that which is good? If your confidence be in the living God, who shall put you to shame?

I must not fail to notice that the poetic utterance, "Thy bread shall be given thee," is also literally true. It has been true to you, my brethren, concerning your daily bread. That word is true, "Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." At times there has been little on the table, but all-sufficiency has still filled the storehouse. When God multiplied the oil and the meal of the poor woman at Zarepta, I do not believe that at any one moment she ever had more than sufficed for a single meal: every day that Elijah lived with her she had to scrape the bottom of the barrel, for she had never more than a handful of meal and a little oil. We are not told that either the barrel or the cruse were filled up; but we read—"the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail." You may frequently reach the

end of your provision, but you can never exhaust your Provider. The meal may come by handfuls, and the oil may only drip out drop by drop, but what matters? Was not the manna from heaven a small round thing, and did it not fall morning by morning? If you have earthly provision as you want it, should it not suffice you? If you get as much as you need at this meal, and as much as you want for the next meal, is it not well? Are not the loaves of heavenly bread all the better for being fresh and fresh? The manna would not keep, but bred worms; who wants such unsavory store? There is nothing like living from hand to mouth when it is from God's hand to faith's mouth. Daily bread promotes daily gratitude, and from God's hand hourly providence brings multiplied love-tokens, and is a surer sign of remembrance than if we could have life's mercies all in a lump. "His bread shall be given him" refers also to heavenly bread, which we have even more cause to think about than about the bread which perisheth: this also shall be given us. If we be driven away from a faithful ministry, if we remove to the utmost ends of the earth where we miss the means of grace, yet the Lord will feed our souls. If his ministers do not feed us, he will himself minister to us. The word of the Lord shall not cease to nourish us. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

As for the waters, the living waters of grace and of the Holy Spirit, these shall always flow: in summer and winter shall the still waters be found at your side; yea, they shall be within you "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Words cannot tell the privilege of the man who lives in God, and lives with God! He need not shiver in the damps of earth—he lives on high; he need not fear the fury of the enemy, for he has a

place of defence; he need not dread the lapse of time, his munitions are of rock; he need not tremble at famine and drought, his needs shall all be met by the care of heaven. The man who knows his sins are forgiven, who is covered with the righteousness of Christ, who is in vital union with the Lord Jesus, who is indwelt by the Holy Ghost: that man, I say, need not desire to be any other than he is, but may give himself up to blessing and praising and magnifying the Most High every moment of his life till he is caught up to the highest heaven, to dwell where enemies cannot threaten nor necessities arise.

III. So this brings me to close by urging you, dear friends, to SEEK THEIR FELICITY.

First, shall I need to say, "Do not try to obtain it by hypocrisy"? Since they are so happy whom God favors, do not think that by getting your name into their church-book you will necessarily be favored too. Oh, brethren, be true believers and not make-believers. Do not pretend to be what you are not. Sinners in Zion are still sinners, and they will one day be afraid. Hypocrites, though joined with the people of God, are still hypocrites, and will ere long be surprised with fearfulness. Do not hope by a mere empty profession to win the blessedness of God's people; for by such means you will win a curse rather than a blessing.

Secondly, do not hope to win the bliss of the righteous by self-righteousness; for although we have been describing righteous men this morning, yet we have not been describing self-righteous men. The self-righteous is not righteous: the two things are wide as the poles asunder. These very people whom God favored had sinned; for we read in the twenty-fourth verse of the chapter, "The people that dwell therein shall be for-

given their iniquity." The blessing is not to the man who glories in his innocence, but "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." These favored people cried, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They knew their need of grace. Do not hope that God will favor you when you neither confess your sin nor seek his grace. Self-righteousness damneth; it is only the righteousness of God that saveth. Seek the character and the privilege of the saints as a gift of divine grace. Fain would I drop into your hearts and mouths that prayer of the second verse: "O Lord, be gracious unto us." I commend it to you. Go to your homes, and in your silent chamber pour out your hearts with cries and tears, saying "O Lord, be gracious unto us. We cannot walk in thy ways, and keep our tongue and eye and ear as we desire to do unless we be renewed and preserved by thy grace. Be gracious in forgiving the past and in helping us for the future to life in thy fear and service. Do this through Christ Jesus our Lord, we implore thee.

Your prayer shall be heard, and these blessings shall be yours; but see to it that you seek unto the Lord by a sincere faith. Again, use the second verse as your guide, and cry "Be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.' Commit yourself to the guardian care of the Lord each day, and specially fly to him in the hour of trouble; then will he create righteousness in you, and cause you in every good work to do his will. Go, I say, and seek unto the Strong for strength, and to the Righteous One for righteousness, and the blessings of the dweller upon the heights shall be yours.

As for you, my dear brothers and sisters, who are really walking before the Lord aright, straining with

your utmost endeavors to do only that which is just and true, at the same time trusting alone in Jesus for your salvation, I would charge you to rejoice exceedingly. If this text be true, that we dwell on high and that our place of defence is the munitions of rocks, and that our bread shall be given us and our waters shall be sure, let us be glad! What a happy people we ought to be! We ought, every one of us, to have a beaming face, a flashing eye, an elastic step, a singing life, a courageous heart. All men should be made to feel that the chosen of the Lord are a happy people. It is our privilege beyond that of all other men to go through the world with heaven about our steps. It is not ours to be clad in the weeds of sorrow, for the Bridegroom is with us. We are not commanded to complain, but to rejoice. I leave to others the task of showing the beauty of groaning, or the delightfulness of murmuring: it is mine to urge you to shake yourselves from the dust, and put on your beautiful garments. Why are you so cast down? Dear people of God, you go out in the streets in rags, and yet you have royal robes provided for you; why do not you put them on? "Oh," say you, "but I have great sorrow." Yes, but it is written, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Why tell everybody of your grief? Is there any good to be done thereby? What does our Lord say? "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast." It is a Christian's duty to be happy. What a blessed religion is that in which joy is a matter of precept—"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

I have been so long away from England that I do not know where our Queen is residing just now; but if I had the wings of a dove, and could mount into the

upper air, I would soon find out. I should look for the Royal Standard. I should see it floating over Windsor or Osborne, and by this token I should espy the royal abode. Fling out the banner to the breeze when the king is within. Is the king at home with you, dear brother? Do not forget to display the standard of holy joy. Hoist it, and keep it flying. When the Bridegroom is not with us we will mourn; but so long as we see his face no man can make us fast. Rejoice, and yet again rejoice, and thus let the Royal Standard fly at the top of the tower: the King is within us! The Prince of Peace is enthroned in our hearts! The Lord is exalted, for he dwelleth on high, and we dwell on high with him. Glory be unto his name. Ring the joy-bells! With clamor of united joy let us shout unto our God who maketh us to ride upon the high places of the earth. Let it be known abroad that there is no God like our God and no people like his people. Under heaven there are none so joyous as the Lord's afflicted saints, none so rich as the Lord's poor, none so honored in heaven as those that are despised of men for Christ's sake, none so worthy to be envied as those who to-day are ridiculed for their faith in God. The Lord be with you, and bless every one of you with the full enjoyment of this majestic text, for Christ's sake. Amen.

III.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

March 30, 1884.

"For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."—JAMES iv. 14.

WHEN a prince dies they toll the great bell of the cathedral that all the city may hear it, and that for miles round the tidings may spread. Swift messengers of the press bear the news through the length and breadth of the land, and all men's ears are made to tingle. A *royal* death is a national warning. A death in any one of our families is a loud call to our own household, a call which I trust we hear; but a death in the royal family has a voice to the whole nation. It will be heard, it must be heard. In this great city the crowds who care not to come to the house of God, will nevertheless hear of this lamented death, and think of it, and speak of it each man to his fellow. Death is an orator whose solemn periods demand attention, especially when he preaches from the steps of the throne. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city," let believers be quick to hear the call to humiliation, to awakening, and to prayer that the visitation may be overruled for great and lasting good.

A *sudden* death is a specially impressive warning. If men die of old age we regard it as coming in the common course of things; but when a young man is suddenly snatched away, then we understand that though the old

must die, the young may die; and that no one among us may reckon upon any long day of life, since in a moment our sun may go down ere it is yet noon. So falls the grass beneath the mower's scythe, so fades the leaf from the tree. In a moment our strength is turned to weakness, and our comeliness into corruption. Then, in accents as plain as they are terrible, the Lord saith, "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!"

We have this week received fresh proof that death is impartial. As the Arab proverb hath it, the black camel stops at every man's door. Sorrows have entered in at the windows of palaces, and even in the royal chamber there lieth one dead. If, therefore, death be so impartial that he smites down the captains, let not the rank and file hope to escape. Death, which forces entrance to a prince's bedchamber, will not respect our cottage door. To us also in due time shall be brought the message, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." My ear hears a voice crying aloud, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." Will not you hear it? Will any one of you refuse the voice which speaketh from heaven? Death evidently pays no respect to character, age, or hopefulness. A man may addict himself to the service of his country, but his patriotism will not protect him. He may be surrounded with a wall of affection, but this will not screen him. He may have at command all the comforts of life, and yet life may ooze out before the physician is aware. He may be tenderly beloved of an affectionate mother, and his name may be engraven on the heart of the fondest of wives, but death hath no regard to the love of women. "It is appointed unto men once to die." There is no discharge in this war: we shall all march into this fight,

and unless the Lord himself shall speedily come and end the present dispensation we shall each one fall upon this battle-field, for the shafts of death fly everywhere, and there is no armor for either back or breast by which his cruel darts may be turned aside. I would to God that all of us retained this truth in our memories. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." We have a very clear conviction that others will die, but as to ourselves, we put far from us the evil day, and care not to dwell upon a subject which smells so unpleasantly of the charnel-house. Yes, we admit that we shall die, but not so soon as to make it a pressing matter; we imagine that we are not within measurable distance of the tomb. Even the oldest man gives himself a little longer lease, and when he has passed his four score years we have seen him hugging life with as much tenacity as if he had just commenced it. Brethren, in this we are not wise; but death will not spare us because we avoid him. What is there about any one of us that we should fare better than the rest of our fellow-men? We are in the same army, marching upon the same field: how shall we escape where all others fall? Two only of our race have gone into the better land without crossing the dark river of death—Enoch and Elijah; but no one among us will make a third.

Now, upon this matter we have nothing to say but what is commonplace, for, garnish them as you may, graves are among the commonest of common things. Yet a solemn reflection upon the shortness of life, and the certainty of death, may prove to be important, and even invaluable, if it be allowed to penetrate our hearts, and influence our lives. History tells us of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who was sitting at a banquet as thoughtless

and careless as any of the revellers, when suddenly one at the table bowed his head and died. Waldo was startled into thought, and went home to seek his God; he searched the Scriptures, and, according to some, became a great helper, if not the second founder, of the Waldensian church, which in the Alpine valleys kept the lamp of the gospel burning when all around was veiled in night. A whole church of God was thus strengthened and perpetuated by the hallowed influence of death upon a single mind. I suppose it is also true that Luther in his younger days, walking with his friend Alexis, saw him struck to the ground by a flash of lightning, and became thenceforward prepared in heart for that deep work of grace through which he learned the doctrine of justification by faith, and rose to be the liberator of Europe from Papal bondage. How much every way we owe to this weighty subject! Among the earnest, the prayerful, the holy, many must own that the vaults of death have brought them spiritual health. Men have been helped to live by remembering that they must die: yea, some men knew nothing of the highest form of life till death aroused them from their deadly slumbers. I hope that God's Spirit may this morning impress many of you with these reflections, and lead you to the cross of Christ by the way of this *memento mori.* May a prince's death awaken many of you to life. He being dead now speaks to you; from yonder sunny shores he reminds you of the valley of death-shade which you must shortly traverse.

With an intense desire for our spiritual profiting I shall speak upon our text in two ways; first, let us consider *the truth in the text*, and, secondly, *the lessons in that truth.*

I. We commence with THE TRUTH IN THE TEXT, upon which we have already touched. The text begins by re

minding us that we have no foresight: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us memory that we may look backward, and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection, and repentance, but God has given us no eyes wherewith to pry into the future. He unveils the past to our penitence; but he veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them, and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so may we faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke. It is good also that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time for their arrival. Great prosperity may await you, and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it; and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like bird-lime, and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below, and prevent our soaring towards heaven. If then we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us we might become more worldly and more earthbound than we are. None of us could desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us: we are glad that it should have less, and therefore we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown.

No, we cannot see far, and those who act as if they could see into coming days behave most foolishly. Hear these people whom James describes; they boast most wretchedly: they will go into the city, they are sure they will, what is to hinder them? "To-day or to-morrow

we will go into such a city,"—they have plenty of time, and can make a selection according to their pleasure: they can go where they like, and when they like. They see themselves with prophetic glance entering in at the city gate, and they are fully assured that they shall "continue there a year." Of course, a year that is a small matter: if they please they will stay longer. They allot themselves a lease for three, seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, at discretion; at least they talk as if they could do so. They are going into the city to "buy and sell": they are sure of that too. Of course they will not be laid up with sickness; they do not fear that accident or disease will keep them away from market, or hinder the active transacting of their business. No, they are going to buy and sell, and such is their confidence in their own superior abilities that they are sure to make a profit of it: the markets cannot fall below the price which they have fixed in their own minds, neither will they make bad debts, nor incur other losses, for they have decided that they will "get gain." Hitherto they have been self-made men, and they mean to go on making themselves, until they put the finishing stroke by adding a few more thousands. They have visions of going on to fortune. Ah, ye prophets, ye are going to your graves! This is a sure oracle. The tomb will be your only patrimony, and the shroud your sole possession. Let none of us talk of what we resolve to do at some future date. Look well to the present, for that is all the time we can be sure of, and there may be little enough of that. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Thus said the wise man; let wise men take heed to his counsel.

The apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed fore-

sight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another day. You have come close up to the end of March, but if you reckon upon what you will do upon the first of April, you may find by the event that you are a fool. You may get to the last day of the year; but if you reckon on a new year, you may be giving new proof of your unwisdom. Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James puts the matter strongly when he asks: "What is your life?" You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it?

The text divides itself into an emphatic question, "What is your life?" and an instructive answer: "It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

First, I say, we have here *an emphatic question:* he asks, "What is your life?" For solidity, for stability; what is it? What is there in it? Is it not composed of such stuff as dreams are made of? The breath in your nostrils is not more unsubstantial than is your life. There, breathe it out! On such a morning as this you see your breath; but it is only in your sight for a moment, and then it vanishes away. Your own breath is a fair picture of the flimsy, airy thing which men call life. What is your life? What is it for continuance? Some things last awhile, and run adown the centuries; but what is your life? Even garments bear some little wear and tear; but what is your life? A delicate texture; no cobweb is a tithe as frail. It will fall before a touch, a breath. Justinian, an emperer of Rome, died by going into a room which had been newly painted; Adrian, a pope, was strangled by a fly; a consul struck his foot against his own threshold, and his foot mortified, so that he died

thereby. There are a thousand gates to death; and though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape stone, killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all. So unstable is our life that the apostle says, What is it? So frail, so fragile is it, that he does not call it a flower of the field, or the snuff of a candle, but asks, What is our life? It is as if he had said—Is it anything? Is it not a near approach to nothing?

Have you ever noticed how David answers this question in the thirty-ninth Psalm? He says in the fifth verse of that psalm that *man is vanity.* What is vanity? It is nothing in reality, it is merely the pretence of something; it is an idle dream, an empty conceit, a delusion, a make-believe. Such is man. But he says more than that: he declares that *every man* is vanity. Princes, kings, philosophers, the strongest, the healthiest, the ablest, the most virtuous—every man is vanity: among the millions of mankind none rises above this dreary state of nothingness. He says more than that: he writes—*every man at his best state is vanity:* when he is in the prime and glory of his life, when he is most healthy and vigorous, when his eye is clearest, and his muscles are firmest, he is still no better than sheer vanity. David goes even further, for thus he speaks—"*Every man at his best state is altogether vanity;*" that is, he is nothing but vanity, there is nothing more enduring about him. He is gone with a puff; he spends his years as a tale that is told. Do not overlook one more emphatic word which David sets in the forefront of the sentence, "*Verily,*" as if he was quite sure of it, and could not

tolerate a question upon the subject—"*Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*"

Have you ever observed how Job, when he speaks of our life, sets us a sign in each of the three elements whereon and wherein we dwell? See his ninth chapter, at the twenty-fifth verse. He says, "My days are swifter than a post:" here is an emblem upon the land. Oriental kings employed swift-footed runners and horses and dromedaries, and these to the Oriental imagination were the very *beau idéal* of speed: even we, before the days of electricity, knew of nothing faster than the royal mail. Job therefore well says, "My days are swifter than a post." Then he bids us look to sea, for he says, "They are passed away as the swift ships;" ships which are built for speed seem to fly as on wings when they spread their sails to a favoring wind. We ought not to view ships at sea without remembering the brevity of our days. But lest we should still forget, the patriarch further likens his days to "the eagle that hasteth to the prey." As the vulture spies from a distance the carcase of a camel, and descends upon it with hasty swoop, so our life hastes to descend. Thus earth, sea, and air all remind us of the speed at which life flies towards its end.

St. Augustine used to say he did not know whether to call it a dying life or a living death, and I leave you the choice between those two expressions. This is certainly a dying life; its march is marked by graves. Nothing but a continuous miracle keeps any one of us from the sepulchre. Were omnipotence to stay its power but for a moment, earth would return to earth, and ashes to ashes. It is a dying life: and equally true is it that it is a living death. We are always dying. Every beating pulse we tell leaves but the number less: the more

years we count in our life, the fewer remain in which we shall behold the light of day. While we are sitting still in this house, the earth is revolving round the sun, and bearing us all through space at an amazing rate. We are all moving, and yet we do not perceive it; even so while you are listening to this sermon you are all being borne onward towards eternity at lightning speed. As though we were laid in the bosom of some mighty angel, and he with outstretched wings darted along like a flame of fire, we are ever urging our onward way. Though we dream that we are at a stay, yet we never rest for an instant. The stream is bearing us onward: we are nearing the cataract. Ever must we obey the mandate—"Onward, onward, onward." From childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to grey old age we march onward in serried ranks from which no man can retire. We tarry not even when we sleep: we are continually moving forward like the waters of yonder river, on whose banks we find a habitation. What, then, is our life? That is a question which remains to a large degree unanswered and unanswerable.

Yet our text affords us what is in some aspects *an instructive answer*. It does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is like. "*It is even a vapor.*" James compares our life, you see, to a very subtle, unsubstantial, flimsy thing—a vapor. If you live upon an eminence, from which you can look down upon a stretch of country, you see in the early morning a mist covering all the valleys. It is singular to mark the tops of the great elms appearing above it, like islands in a sea of cloud, with perhaps here and there a church spire rising like a sharp pryamid from the waste of mist. In a little time you look from the same window, and the vapor has all vanished. It was so thin, so fine, so much like gos-

samer, that a breath of wind has scattered it, or peradventure the sun has drawn it aloft; at any rate, not a trace of that all-encompassing vapor remains. Such is your life. Or you have marked a cloud in the western sky, illuminated with those marvellous lights which glowed during those extraordinary sunsets, the like of which none of our fathers had seen. You looked at the jewelled mass; it shone in the perfection of beauty, and all the colors of the rainbow were blended in its hues: in another instant, lo, it was not; it was gone past all recall. Such is your life. This morning, as we came hither, we saw our breath: it was before our eye for an instant, and anon it had gone. Such is the picture which James presents to us. "What is your life? It is even a vapor."

He proceeds to explain his own symbol in a sentence which is full of meaning. "It is even a vapor, *that appeareth.*" Notice that. He does not speak of it as a substance, having a true existence, but says that it "*appeareth.*" Vapor is so ethereal, phantom-like, and unreal, that it may rather be said to appear than to exist. If you could reach yon fleecy cloud, you would scarcely know that you had entered it, for it would possibly appear to be the thinnest of mist. The vapor which steams from your mouth, how light, how airy, it is next door to nothing; it only "appeareth." And such is this life—a dream, a vain show, an apparition of the night. Half our joys and sorrows are but the pretence of joy and the shadow of sorrow; and the most of things through which we travel are not what they seem. We ought to know this in a practical way, and set less store by the things which are seen, which are temporal. This life "appeareth"—that is all.

Further, the apostle says, It "appeareth *for a little*

time." It is only a very little while that a man lives at the longest. Compare a man's life with that of a tree. There is so striking a contrast between our present short life and that of a cedar, or an oak, that to set forth the longer life of saints in the millennial age the Lord says, "As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." In that happy age men shall flourish long as the trees of the forest; but now a man standing beneath an oak is a mere infant compared with the boughs which overshadow him. A hundred years ago that oak seemed every way as venerable as it does to-day, whereas the man was then unthought of by his grandsire. Compare our life with the existence of this world; I mean not the present state of the earth as fitted up for man, but I allude to those unknown ages which intervened between the present arrangement and that beginning wherein God created the heavens and the earth. The long eras of fire and water, the reigns of fishes and reptiles, the periods of tropical heat and polar ice, make one think of man as a thing of yesterday. Then contrast our life with the being of the eternal Lord; and what is man—man when most venerable with years? A Methuselah, what is he? He is but an insect born in the morning's sunbeam, sporting in the noontide ray, and dead when the dews begin to fall. He appeareth for a little while.

The parallel is further consummated by the apostle's adding, "*And then vanisheth away.*" The cloud is gone from the mountain. Where is it? It has vanished away. No trace of it is left, neither can you recall it. We too shall soon be gone; gone as a dream when one awaketh. With the most of us our remembrance will be short. Many leave us concerning whom it would be a pity that they should be remembered; while many fail

to live for others, and therefore their fellows speedily forget them. Amid the crowded cemetery a single grave is lost; amid ten thousand deaths no one departure can long abide in human memory. As far as this world is concerned we all shall by-and-by vanish away. Then shall our near companion say of us,

> "One morn I missed him on the accustomed hill,
> Along the heath, and near his favorite tree;
> Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
> Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."

The air has felt the passing bell, and now the stars look down upon a stone writ large with "HERE HE LIES!" Or the dews shall wet a grass-grown mound, girt about with brambles, on which a few wild flowers have sprung up spontaneously to show how life shall yet triumph over death. Children may bear our name, and yet a fourth generation shall quite forget that we ever sojourned in this region. Such is our life—"a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is the truth; you know it, but I cannot impress it upon your hearts as it ought to be impressed; hence I invite you to join me in the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we man apply our hearts unto wisdom."

II. Secondly, let us now learn THE LESSONS WHICH LIE WITHIN THIS TRUTH. May we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the same.

First, If this life be unsubstantial as a vapor,—and nobody can deny the fact,—let us regard it as such, and let us seek for something substantial elsewhere.

> "This world's a dream, an empty show;
> But the great world to which I go
> Hath joys substantial and sincere:
> When shall I wake and find me there?"

It may be well to make the best of both worlds; but of this poor world nothing can be made unless it be viewed in the light of another. This is a poor withering life at the best, for we all do fade as a leaf. Unless we purposely live with a view to the next world, we cannot make much out of our present existence. Such cast clouts and rotten rags as this poor present world of time and sense, can never be made up into an array in which a man would care to robe himself. At the same time, do not be frightened at the unhandsome form in which this life at times appears: it is after all but a vapor; and who will be alarmed at it? Do not be overjoyed as he was who hoped to embrace a goddess, and was deceived by a cloud: it is after all but a semblance; its sorrows are scarcely worth a tear, nor do its joys deserve a smile; vanity and vapor are things which wise men set small store by. Children may be pleased with the bubbles which they blow by the aid of an old pipe and a piece of soap; but as for men who have put away childish things, they ought not to be greatly moved by the things of this life, for they are but bubbles of less brilliance and less substance than those which delight the boy. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." Let the lower lights burn dimly before your eye; they are mere sparks, they are quenched full soon. Let us grip the eternal, and sit loose by the temporal. The jewels of eternity will glitter in our crowns when all things pass away; but the trifles of this life are as the flowers which children pluck in the meadows, which wither in their hands before they can carry them home.

In this place I suggest as your prayer that stanza of the poet, in which he addresses the Well-beloved thus—

"Show me thy face—
My faith and love
Shall henceforth fixed be,
And nothing here have power to move
My soul's serenity.
My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
And all I feel and see
Illusive, visionary,—Thou
The one reality."

Next, Is life most uncertain? We know it is; no one attempts to deny it. It is certain that life will come to an end; but it is most uncertain when it will come to that end. Is it so uncertain? Then let us not delay. I would to God I could whisper this wisdom into every procrastinator's ear. Why dost thou halt and hesitate? If thou art desirous to be saved from the wrath to come, why dost thou put it off till a to-morrow which may never come? Wilt thou delay repenting, and die impenitent? Wilt thou delay faith, and perish as an unbeliever? Wilt thou keep back from mercy and pardon, and refuse the free grace of God? I pray thee do not so; for if thou delay another day, it may be thou wilt be in the land where hope can never come to thee. Think of your peril, O ye ungodly men! Within an hour you may be at the judgment-seat of God, or in the pit of hell. Nothing keeps you where there is hope except a thread so fine as to be invisible, and so easily broken that none but a madman would trust his soul's destiny upon it. Awake, I pray thee! Since death is hastening, haste thou thyself until thou hast found a refuge in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and art safe in the arms of Jesus. Since life is so uncertain, oh, haste thee, Christian, to serve thy God while the opportunity is given thee: be diligent to-day to do those works which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do. Thou wilt soon be where thou canst no more give alms to the

poor, nor instruct the ignorant, nor visit the fatherless and the widow. Thou shalt have no opportunities for speaking to men about their souls, or winning them for Christ, when once this shadowy life has vanished away. How earnest every worker ought to be to do his work well while he has the opportunity! I have charged myself again and again—I would to God the charge had been more effectual—to preach

> "As though I ne'er might preach again,
> A dying man to dying men."

I am persuaded that if we were in possession of all the wisdom that grace will give us, we should do everything for the good of men most speedily, with deep prayerfulness, with true spiritual life, and with an entire dependence upon the Spirit of God for the blessing of it. Come, my brother, what thou doest do quickly. If thou wishest to honor thy Lord whilst thou art here, and win jewels for his crown, up and at it, for the day is far spent. Thou canst not afford to waste a moment, for thou hast much to do, and very little time to do it in. Help us, O Spirit of the Lord!

Is life so short? Does it only appear for a little time, and then vanish away? Then let us put all we can into it. If life be short, it is wisdom to have no fallows, but to sow every foot of ground while we can. It will be prudent to pack our little space as full as possible. Somebody said the other day of our dear friend Mr. Moody, that he was the only man who could pronounce "Jerusalem" in two syllables. It shows the activity of the man that he can speak as much in two syllables as other people can say in four: he is always at it, working for his Master double tides, rowing with both hands. Some speakers are long in delivering short sense; in-

stead of saying much in little, they say little in much. Oh, for some one to teach them to say "Jerusalem" in two syllables!

Let us put plenty of life into our existence, plenty of work into our life, plenty of heart into our work, and plenty of warmth into our heart. Oh, may God give us to live while we live! May we not only live but be all alive.

Is life so short? Then do not let us make any very great provision for it. I have heard of certain people who are so imprudent that they never lay by anything for a rainy day, to whom I would say, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." It would be a poverty-stricken world if all followed the example of improvidence which is set by certain spiritual blunderers. There is a thriftiness which we all ought to exercise; but there is no justification for laying up treasure which will never be used. Ants do not store up grain for storing's sake: they do but divide over the whole year the harvest of a month. To hoard up endless gold is a species of insanity. If I were going a day's voyage, I should not wish to take with me enough biscuit and salt beef to last for three years; it would only cumber the boat. One walking-stick is an admirable help, as I often find; but to carry a bundle of them when going on a journey would be a superfluity of absurdity. Alas, how many load themselves as if life's journey would last a thousand years, at the least! Some men have amassed hundreds of thousands of pounds: when are they going to enjoy their wealth? They are getting more and more, and this occupies all their time: they are so busy cooking that they never have time to

dine; they are so taken up with filling the wardrobe that they are all in rags. We do not want a ton weight of candles if we are only going to sit up for a few minutes. Let us be wise enough to suit the supply to the need.

Is time so short? Then do not let us fret about its troubles and discomforts. A man is on a journey, and puts up at an inn, and when he is fairly in the hostelry, he perceives that it is a poor place, with scant food, and a hard bed. "Well, well," says he, "I am off the first thing to-morrow morning, and so it does not matter." This world is an inn, and if there are certain discomforts in it, let us remember that we are not tenants for years, but only guests for a day. Let us make the best we can of the temporary accommodation which this poor shanty of a world affords. Our life is removed as a shepherd's tent, which was a hovel in which the shepherds watched their sheep. A shepherd who has to watch the sheep for a short time does not set to work to build a granite palace, or a brick house: he is satisfied with a reed hut, and does not complain of its scant space and slender strength. So let it be with us. Let us sing together—

> "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
> So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

Must life vanish away? We know it must. What then? That vanishing is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Dear friends, may I recommend you to remember that death is the end of this life? Do not leave this life to be ravelled out at the end. I would like to have a well-hemmed life, with a finish about it. I would like to have my life enclosed with a ring-fence of completeness. Too many leave life's business in such

a way that they leave endless trouble for their families: lawyers devour their substance, and their children are impoverished. See that your will is made, your debts paid, your charities distributed, and all your affairs are arranged. Set your house in order; it is your duty as a citizen; it is your higher duty as a Christian. Do all that you would like to have done if you knew you would die to-morrow. I like Mr. Whitefield's order; for he could not go to bed comfortably if his gloves were not in his hat ready for the morning. He felt that he could not tell when he would be called away; but he wished to have everything in its place whenever the summons should come.

Must this life vanish away? Then recollect it is the beginning of another. The life present melts into the life to come. What kind of life will that other be? Do you not think that if it is to be a glorious life it ought to commence here? Who would like to enter heaven, could it be possible, and feel compelled to say, "I cannot join in the music, for I do not know the tune; I cannot take up the hymn, for I know nothing of the song. I cannot glorify God, for I never did so while below. I cannot adore the Lamb, for I never trusted in him while I was on earth." You must learn the music here, or you will never sing in the choirs of heaven. Oh, that this might arouse some of you! By the memory that this life must vanish away may you be led to seek that eternal life which will abide in its excellency world without end.

And is death quite sure to come to me? Then, as I cannot avoid it, let me face it. If there were a way of avoiding it, I might postpone all consideration of it; but since I must meet it, let me know what I am at; let me get ready for the inevitable, may be it will become de-

sirable. The thought of death will be one of two things to us: it will be a ghost to haunt us if we remain out of Christ, unreconciled to God, and unrenewed in heart. To Godless and Christless persons death will be the king of terrors in prospect and in reality. Ungodly men cannot bear to think of being called away. This morning they feel very uncomfortable while I am treating upon this troublesome subject. I hope they will not soon recover their composure, but will remain uncomfortable till they yield to divine love, and trust in the living Saviour. Death is an awful thing to those who have their all in this world. If they could but live here for ever, they would be at peace; but it cannot be so. God will not give men an immortality in this life to spend in disregarding him. They must die. They may put Christ far from them, but they cannot put death far from them; they may avoid the Cross, but they cannot avoid the grave. The ungodly man frowns upon death because death frowns upon him. Death is the skeleton in his closet; it is the spectre at the foot of his bed; it is the canker of his fairest joy. I would not like to be in such a position. Count me down all the red gold that could buy this round world, yet would I not accept it if I must live in fear of death.

But death will become another thing to you if you are renewed in heart. To the Christian it is an angel beckoning him onward and upward. It were not worth while to live on earth if this life were not to be crowned by death: I mean by leaving this world to go unto the Father. It is the supreme delight of the man who runs the race that is set before him that that course concludes with the winning-post, and so comes to an end. We are not of those who voyage the sea of this life for the sake of it: we ask not for ever to sail over this rough

ocean, we long for land. It is our delight to think of the port ahead, our joy to see the snow-white cliffs of our heavenly Albion. We do not desire to live here always. Why should we? Banished from our God, liable to sin, subject to temptation, vexed with infirmities, struggling with corruptions, O Lord, what wait we for?

> "Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge
> That sets my longing soul at large,
> Takes off my chains, breaks up my cell,
> And gives me with my God to dwell!"

Believers have everything to gain by dying. "To die is gain." We shall lose nothing which will be a loss to us. If one should take from us a jewel, but should give us another a thousand times its value, we should not regret the exchange. We lose this life, let it be such a jewel as you like, but we win the life to come, which is infinitely more precious. Beloved, instead of fearing death, we would be willing rather to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Why should we be unwilling to be glorified? Our departing day is our marriage-day. Oh, that the bells would ring it in! It is our home-coming from the school where we have been in training here below. Why are the minutes so slow, the years so long? Let the holidays, the holy days, come soon, when we shall be at home in the Father's house! "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but it very soon will appear, and it will be no mere appearing—it will be real joy and lasting pleasure, solid, substantial, eternal, like the God who has prepared it for us from of old. It is a blessed thing to be able to go through the world thanking God for this life, but blessing him yet more that it will land us at his right hand. Death is thus stripped of all dread; the curse is turned into a

blessing. At the thought of it I feel ready to join in that rough but sweet verse—

> "Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
> But gladly put off these garments of clay;
> To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
> Since Jesus to glory through death led the way."

God grant us so to live and die that we may live to die no more, for Christ's sake. Amen.

IV.

ESTHER'S EXALTATION; OR, WHO KNOWETH?

April 27, 1884.

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—ESTHER IV. 13, 14.

THE appeal of Mordecai in his pressing time of distress was to one single person, namely, to Esther. I believe that I shall do better this morning by making my sermon an address to individuals than by speaking of nations or churches. I assuredly believe that England has been raised up as a nation and brought to her present unique position that she may be the means of spreading the gospel throughout all the nations of the earth. I judge that God has blessed the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race—England and the United States—and given them pre-eminence in commerce and in liberty on purpose that in such a time as this they may spread abroad the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Woe to these nations if they fail to fulfil their solemn obligations. If, being raised up for a purpose, they refuse to perform it, they shall melt away. If, being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle, both empires will perish as surely as did the power of Macedon and the dominion

of Rome. We ought to be very careful as a people to act upon the rule of righteousness and the principles of peace; for any other conduct is inconsistent with our high calling. We are entrusted with great opportunities; if we do not rightly use them the New Zealander of Macaulay may yet survey the ruins of this empire-city. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed," said Mordecai to Esther, and he says the same to us. Oh, that England may know the day of her visitation.

We might properly say of any Christian church that it has its own appointed place in the purposes of divine mercy. If the candle is lighted, even though it be set upon a golden candlestick, it is not lighted for itself, but that it may give light to all that are in the house. If any church fail to bless others, and so proves unfaithful to her solemn trust, the Lord will take away the can dlestick out of its place, and leave the unfaithful to mourn in darkness. Remember the Lord's warning voice, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." Remember, also, unfaithful Jerusalem, whose house is left unto her desolate because she obeyed not the voice of the Lord. The church in Rome was once a church of high commanding influence for good: you know what it has become. Some other churches are on the way, I fear, to the same dreadful end. God grant that none of the churches with which we are connected as Christian people may ever either apostatize from the faith, or grow lax and worldly, or become indifferent to the glory of God and the salvation of men. I might thus speak to each church and say, "Who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

My brethren, it is a wonderfully easy thing to de-

nounce the faults of a government or of a nation, to complain of this being done, and of that being left undone; and this amusement may only serve to divert our conscience from its more profitable duties at home. But consider the matter, and remember that in a free state we each one are part and parcel of the nation, and of the government; and we are each one personally responsible in our measure and degree for all the acts of the nation. It is an easy matter to tie up our country to the halberds like a criminal and then to flagellate it without mercy; it would be a far more profitable business to use the whip of criticism upon ourselves.

The same is true with regard to a church. Men are too apt to condemn in the mass what they tolerate in themselves as individuals. But why are we so ready to accuse the churches? Why are we so censorious as to what the churches do, and what the churches are? Who make up the churches? Why, we each one by our influence help to make the churches good, or bad, or indifferent, as the case may be. Therefore, I will not waste time in generalities, but I will come to personalities. I will follow Mordecai's tack, and speak alone to Esther; that is to say, to each one who may happen to be here to whom God has entrusted opportunity, talent, and position, I would urge them to remember that there is a something for each believer to do, a work which he cannot delegate to another, a task which it is his privilege to be permitted to undertake, which it will be to his solemn disgrace and detriment if he do not execute, but which will be to his eternal glory under God if he be found faithful in it. The gospel assures us that the great householder has committed talents "to every man according to his several ability." Our hope of success this morning in our sermon shall lie in your individual-

izing yourselves and hearing the voice of the Spirit of God, saying to each one, "Who knoweth whether *thou* art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I shall lay out my sermon in four parcels, arranging it under four words.

I. The first word is HEARKEN! Hearken to my word, as Mordecai desired Esther to hearken to him. Hearken while God the Lord speaks to your heart, and calls you to your high vocation.

Hearken, first, to a question. Brother, *will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God?* I do not think that Mordecai was afraid that Esther would do so; but still it is sometimes as well to prevent an evil before we perceive it; and he did so by saying, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house." It was possible that being a queen it might enter into her mind that she would be safe even if all the rest of the Jews were put to death.

It would be a painful thing that her countrymen should be destroyed, but still the stroke might not touch her in the seclusion of the palace, where she had "not yet showed her kindred nor her people." She would still remain the favored wife of the great king; and she might, therefore, selfishly look to herself, and leave those who were in peril to look to themselves or to their God, while she coldly hoped that the Lord would somehow or other give them deliverance. Does that temptation come across the path of any one of us? It may. You may say, "I shall be saved though the city should perish in its iniquity. Though the people are steeped in poverty and ignorance, I shall enjoy plenty and live in light. I know the Lord myself, and that is my main concern; if the heathen perish I am not one of them, and I am thankful that it will not interfere with my destiny." Will you argue in this self-

ish manner? Will you follow the wicked policy of separating your own personal interests from those of your Redeemer and his church? If so your ship is wrecked before it leaves the harbor. You are no child of God if this principle holds the mastery over you. Your salvation lies not in your separation from Christ and his church, but in your union with them. Over the sea of life there is no passing in safety but in the vessel which carries your Lord and his disciples. Are you going to sail in a separate boat, or will you try to swim across the sea in your own strength? Then look to yourself, and expect disaster. If your interests and Christ's are to be separated you must supply yourself with atonement, with righteousness, with spiritual life, and with heavenly food; yea, you must make a heaven for yourself. You cannot do this, and therefore it would be your ruin to attempt to stand alone. Do you wish to be joined with Jesus so as to be rescued from hell? I tell you, sirs, there is no receiving Christ unless you receive his doctrine and rule. You must receive this grace also, namely, that you give yourself to him to make his interests your interests, his life your life, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory. Your personal welfare will be found in submergence into Christ. Sink or swim with your Lord and his cause. Do you mean to separate yourself from the church of God, and say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you *will* be lost, but I say you *are* lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice. Some of our worst fetters are those which are forged by selfishness, and this is one of the chief bonds which our Redeemer must burst for us. We must live unto God and love others as God hath loved us, or else

we are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I conceive that nobody who professes to be a Christian would deliberately wish to set up a private estate apart from Christ and his cause. Then if you are partners in name, be partners in fact. If you have fellowship with Christ—remember that it is of the essence of fellowship that you are in co-partnership with him; if he is a loser, you are a loser, and you are to fret about it; and if he is a gainer, you are a gainer, and you are to joy therein. He bids you rejoice with him that he has found his sheep that was lost. I ask again,—Are you determined to set up a separate interest from Christ? If you are, say so deliberately and count the cost. Mark that man; for though he may in his selfishness spread himself abroad and flourish like a green bay tree, yet the day shall come when he shall wither, and the place that knows him shall know him no more for ever. O professed servant of God, minister, deacon, or private church-member, thou shalt perish if once thou beginnest to live unto thyself. Remember that word, ye careless women, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth;" and hearken, ye selfish religionist, to this truth: "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die."

Hearken to a second question. *If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them?* You are a church-member: you think also that you are a living member of the body of Christ, and you are tempted to look to yourself and to leave others to their shifts. Hearken,—"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." Is it so, that because you are yourself a member of a flourishing church, and because you enjoy all sorts of Christian privileges, you therefore harden your heart concerning dying churches and desponding saints?

Do you imagine that the body can be sick, and yet you as a member of it will not suffer? I tell you, if the church of God goes aside it will be to your injury; if the truth of God be not preached you will be a loser; if Christian life be not vigorous you will be weakened. When a baneful atmosphere is over other Christians you will breathe it. Sinners cannot be left in their spiritual death without creating a foulness in the air which is to the peril of us all. If this great city is left to seethe and rot in its infidelity and misery and filthiness, fancy not that you Christian people will escape. You dwell with these outcasts, and you are already feeling their influence, and will feel it still more if they do not feel yours. How far and how deep that participation will go I will not venture to prophesy, for I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet; but there are elements now fermenting which threaten, first, the existence of the commonwealth, and next, the liberties of Christian worship. Take you good heed, my brethren; things cannot long remain as they are. This great flood of wretchedness must be assuaged, or it will sweep us all away. I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in overcrowded rooms will not die unavenged if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of want. If you live in a house well-ventilated, and well-drained, and you have near you hovels foul, filthy, dilapidated, overcrowded, when the fever breeds there it will not respect your garden wall; it will come up into your windows, smite down your children, or lay you yourself in the grave. As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease; it must and will spread on all

sides. This may be a selfish argument; but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head. You Christian people suffer if the church suffers; you suffer even if the world suffers. If you are not creating a holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you. Unconsciously the death which is all around will creep over you who are idle in the church, and it will soon paralyze all your energies unless in the name of God you arouse yourselves to give battle to it. You must unite with the Lord and his people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you. Hearken to this, and let it sink into your mind.

Next, remember, for your humiliation, that *God can do without you.* Enlargement and deliverance will arise to his people from another place if it come not by us. If the Lord were tied up to any one man, or any one church, or any one nation, it were treasonable for that person, church, or nation to be negligent; but as the Lord waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men, it becomes them to mind what they are at. He can do without *us.* When he looked and there was no man, his own arm brought salvation; and as it was of old so will it be again. Mark you that. The great owner of the vineyard will have fruit at the end of the year, and if yonder tree does not bear it, he will cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? If the husbandmen consult their own gain, and plot to gain the inheritance for themselves, their Lord will destroy them, "and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." He will effect his purpose; he will fetch home his banished; he will gather together his scattered sheep; he will cause the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the

waters cover the sea; and if we do not gather in the wanderers, or spread the knowledge of his grace, the work will be done by more faithful men. The Spirit saith unto the church in Philadelphia, "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown of this church has been soul-winning: suffer none to rob you of it. If any one of you has gained already the high honor of bringing sinners to Christ, do not lose it by a future life of sloth or powerlessness. Hold fast your zeal and perseverance, that you may be rewarded at the last day.

He can do without you; recollect that, O servant of the Lord! We are apt to think ourselves wonderfully important, and begin to fret if we are put aside from our work for a little; but perhaps this affliction is necessary to teach us and to teach all that know us to cease from man and to look to God alone. It would be a sad thing to exhibit pride and self-conceit, and provoke the Lord to show the world how readily he can dispense with our labors. With this truth in view my heart cries—

> "Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,
> But train me for thy will."

Here follows a still more sobering reflection. Recollect that as God can do without us, *it may be he will do without us.* It might come to pass that God would say, "I will no more bless the world by this England; she has become selfishly mercantile; she cares more for commerce than for righteousness; she is drunken and infidel; I will give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor, whose labor is ill-requited; let her pass away as all oppressors must, and let the nations say—"Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought." He may say to any church,

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." "Ichabod" has been written aforetime, and may be again, on places where once there shone upon the forefront the inscription—"Holiness unto the Lord." So also any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul, and said to him, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Though, like Samson, a hero may have slain his thousands, and the hopes of Israel hang upon the hero; yet shorn and blinded, he may yet grind with slaves at the mill if his lusts enslave him. The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared in such a time as this to do our very utmost, and to lay ourselves out for the cause of truth and holiness. It may please the Lord to say of a wicked and slothful servant, "Take away his talent from him and give it to him that hath ten talents." He may say to any pastor among us, "Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishoprick let another take." Hearken, I pray you, to this warning from the Lord. Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord will judge his people, and to whom much is given of him shall much be required.

Hearken to yet one thing more. *How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it come upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be wasted?* What if Israel had been destroyed for lack of Esther's intercession? Her name would have been a byword among other nations as a base and traitorous woman. If the people had been spared by some other means, and she had refused her mission, as long as there lived a Jew they would have kept no feast of Purim, but have cursed her memory. When I think of the neglects of our own ancestors I am anxious that we take warning by them. There are at

this moment straths in the Highlands which are thoroughly Romish. Why? They were not carefully evangelized at the time of the Reformation. If the workers of that period had done their work thoroughly there would have been no Romish valleys in Presbyterian Scotland. Ireland still cowers under the shadow of the Pope; there was a hopeful time when better things were promised, but this was allowed to pass by; and what can be done to rescue Ireland now? Times do not tarry, and tides do not wait; and if we do not avail ourselves of them while they are with us, our descendants may lament our neglects. I fear that the best among us can recollect with regret times which we have suffered to pass over us unimproved. We can never call them back again. You did not train your children: they are men and women now, and will not listen to you. Oh, parents, why did you not speak to them when they would have listened? But what if a whole life should glide away in living for yourselves, in living for your own comfort and enriching? What if you have done nothing in all these years for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the coming of his kingdom? What disgrace awaits the unfaithful servant! What dishonor awaits *you!* If you have been clouds without rain, wells without water, smoking lamps giving no light, fields that yield no harvest, what must be your portion? Let every Esther resolve that she will never bring this ban upon her name: let every man, woman, and even child among us, knowing the Lord, feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that by imperative necessity we must serve according to our capacity the cause of God and truth. If we even perish through our zeal for the Lord of hosts it will be grand thus to lose our lives. Thus much for the word "Hearken." May the Spirit of God sanctify your hearts by word.

II. I change a little, and the call is now "CONSIDER."

Consider to what some of you have been advanced. You have been raised to salvation. You have been lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. I have uttered the word "salvation"; but what an infinity of goodness lies hidden there! In the music of that word all sweetnesses meet together. What are the obligations of one elected according to the foreknowledge of God, redeemed by the heart's blood of Christ and quickened by the Holy Ghost. What manner of persons ought we to be? You have been raised to that honor, walk worthy of it. Besides that, some of you have been raised to a considerable degree of Christian knowledge,—you are not now mere babes in grace; you are well instructed, and you have a blessed experience both of trouble and of joy, which has made you strong in the Lord, and has confirmed you in the faith, and has admitted you into the inner circle where the joy of the Lord is best known. If I had said that you had been elevated to be queens, like Esther, it would have been a poor elevation compared with that which you have actually received. Some of you who are the favorites of heaven have leaned your head on Christ's bosom, and have been permitted to sit where angels would wish to be; you are near and dear to Jesus, and espoused to him in love.

In addition to all this, the Lord has raised some of you out of poverty and brought you to comparative wealth, perhaps to positive wealth; and he has given you positions which once you never dreamed of. To this he adds domestic comfort, and health, and prosperity in all its forms. The Lord has also given you talent. I fear we have all of us more ability than we use—but some have more talent than they themselves are aware

of, and this perhaps they display in business, but never in the cause of God.

Thus you are brought to the kingdom; but why is it so? I want you to consider *why the Lord has brought you where you are.* Do you think that he has done it for your own sake? Does he intend all this merely that you may practice self-indulgence? Can this be the design of God? Do not think so. Has he done all this merely to give you pleasure? Not so: God's work is like a net of many meshes, and these are all connected with each other. We are links of the same chain, and cannot move without moving others. We are members of one body, and God acts towards us with that fact in view. He does not bless the hand for the hand's sake, but for the sake of the whole body. Well then, dear friend, you are saved that you may save; you are taught that you may teach; you are confirmed in the faith that you may confirm others; talents are allotted to you that you may turn them over and bring in heavenly usury for your Lord. Whatever you have is yours not to hoard for yourself, or to spend upon yourself, but that you may use it as a good steward of God. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom which God has given thee for such a time as this, when there is need of thee and all that thou hast?

Consider, next, *at what a time it is that you have been thus advanced.* You have been instructed in the faith in a time when unbelief is rampant. What for? You have been confirmed in full assurance at a time when many are weak and trembling. What for? You have been entrusted with talent in a time when multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge. What for? You are found in the church when valued brethren are dying or moving off. Why is this? You have wealth

when many are starving. Why is this? You hold a high position when many master spirits are leading men into infidelity, or ritualism, or communism. Why are you placed where you are? Brother, your inevitable answer must be that God has put you where you are for some good purpose, which purpose must be connected with his own glory, and with the extension of his kingdom in the world. If, however, you think it enough to have secured a fortune, let me ask you—Do you think you are the proprietor of what you have amassed; or do you admit that you are a steward? If you are a steward, use not the goods entrusted to you for your own ends, but for your Master; for if you do not, you are a thief. Whenever a steward considers that the estate is his own property, and not his master's, he is a thief, and before long his master will deal with him and say, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Consider also, I pray you, *under what very special circumstances you have come where you are.* To you as an individual I distinctly speak, and to no one else. It was a very strange thing that Esther, who was the foster child of Mordecai, a humble Jew, should rise from lowly rank to be the queen of Persia. Out of all the women gathered from every province how singular that she should be chosen to be queen! Special Providence selected the Jewish maiden for the throne. The like is true of each one of us now occupying a post of usefulness. David was taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, that he might be the shepherd of God's people Israel. I am marvelling to find myself where I now am; are not you? How came you into your present pastorate, my dear brother in the ministry? How did you gain that comfortable position

which you now occupy in society? How came you even to be in the church of God? Oh, if anybody had told yonder brother a few years ago that he would be here, he would have sworn at them; but here he is, sitting at the feet of Jesus, charmed to be his disciple.

Now, consider what a wonder of grace you are, what a singular favor it is that you are where you are. Should not these remarkable dealings of the Lord towards you bind you to the divine service? Many a man of business here to-day obtaining a satisfactory livelihood has a dozen times been within an inch of bankruptcy, and yet he has obtained help, and passed the rock in safety. Some of you have been well-nigh ruined several times; and yet you still have bread to eat and raiment to put on. It is a miracle in your eyes that you have not come to beggary. Let your special deliverances and memorable mercies be as the tongue of persuasion, constraining you to grateful service. Consider how great things the Lord has done for you, and let us not have to say, "Many times did he deliver them, but they soon forgat his works. They understood not his wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of his mercies."

Then I beg you to consider once more, *with what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you.* I believe you are endowed with special capacity for a certain work, so that no one is so fitted for it as yourself: you are a key to a lock which no other key will fit so well. God has prepared you for the work for which you are appointed. Is it not written —"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work"? Each laborer for the Lord has his proper tools found him. God does not, like Pharaoh, require us to make bricks without straw, nor to fight without weapons, nor to

build without a trowel. The Lord provides lamps, and oil, and wedding-garments for all who are called to the Bridegroom's midnight banquet. You, my brother, are equipped for such work as the Lord has appointed you; will you not at once get to your post? You say, "If I could preach, I would do it gladly." You would not preach worthily unless you are even now prepared to do other service for which you are fitted. You would be a disgrace to the pulpit if you are useless in the home circle. If God entrusts you with a single talent, and you do not use it, neither would you use ten talents; for he that is unfaithful in that which is least, would be unfaithful in that which is greatest.

"But," says one, "I can hardly get out to public worship; I am a mother shut in at home with five or six little children." To you there is a little kingdom in your own household. No one can bring up those little ones for the Lord so well as you can. Your influence over them is as strong as it is tender. Now, do not say, "Because I am not allowed to be a preaching woman, therefore I will not attend to the lowly care of my children." It is far better to train a little family for Jesus than to be attempting a work to which you are not called. Let each one of you feel that he has come to his own little kingdom for such a time as this. You and your work fit each other: God has joined you together, let no man put you asunder. Ask for more power from the Holy Spirit, and if there happens to be a tool which the Lord intends for you which hangs a little higher than your present reach, get the ladder of earnest endeavor and you will soon attain to it. Consider how you can improve yourself; give yourself to reading; study Scripture more, and use all helps towards increased knowledge and efficiency. If a further qualification be

within your reach, be eager for it, and even the reaching after it may be as great a blessing to you as the talent itself.

III. Thirdly, ASPIRE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Rise to the utmost possible height. Fulfil your calling to its loftiest degree. Not only do all that you are sure you can do, but aim at something which as yet is high up among the questions. Say to yourself, "Who knoweth?" That is what the ambitious man says when he aspires to be great. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, and honors, and riches of this world; but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honor God and bless men. Who knows? Does anybody know what God may do by you? Does anybody know what capacities slumber within your bosom? I suggest the enquiry, and I will help you to an answer.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *Nobody knows to the contrary.* I cannot tell but what God may bless you to this entire nation. Nobody will dare to say that he cannot. I cannot tell but what God may bless you, my friend, to that part of London in which you live, even though you may be deeply conscious of its great needs, and of your own insufficiency. Who can tell what the Lord can or will do? Dear mother, who knows but what the Lord Jesus may bless you to all the members of your family, so that by your means all the little ones shall come to him? Nobody has any right to speak to

the contrary. Who knows but what God may bless you, dear teacher, to all your Sunday-school class, so that you may meet them all in heaven? Nobody can declare that it shall not be so, therefore strive after it. The watchword is, "Aspire."

Further, *nobody knows the limit of the possibilities which surround any man—should God please to use him.* "Alas," cries one, "I am soon at the end of my powers." My dear brother, if you begin calculating how much there is in you by nature, and how much you can do of yourself, you may as well end the enquiry by hearing our Lord's word—"Without me ye can do nothing." Though you be no better than a mere cipher, yet the Lord can make something of you. Set one before a cipher and it is ten directly. Let two or three noughts combine to serve the Lord, and if the Lord Jesus heads them these nothings become tens of thousands. Who knows what you can do? Shall the church ever say, "Here is a problem we cannot solve?" Bite your lip through rather than have it thought that you doubt the power of the Almighty. All things are possible to him that believeth. Ye are able to take the land into possession, the Lord being your helper. Go up against even these entrenched Canaanites, the walls of whose cities reach to heaven, for you can drive them out. You seem in your own sight to be as grasshoppers when compared with the sons of Anak; but the Lord on high is mighty, and out of the weakest things he hath ordained strength to his honor and glory. Young man, I trust you have given your heart to the Lord; what are you going to do? You have come into some property unexpectedly; or you are promoted in a house of business—what is the meaning of it? "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My

talented brother, should you not take your share in battling with present evils? I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences: he will come out soon, and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter. John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife, and he will be heard of at Geneva. A young man is here this morning—I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him, starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seeking for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord. Some beloved brethren are here who have done a good deal, and the Lord has blessed them; but their work is heavy and their hearts are weary. By the anointing which has given you the kingdom, I trust that you will not be weary in well-doing. Pluck up courage, for a grand future is before you. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Be content to be a living sacrifice. Say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. I am content to give myself up for such a cause. Come life, come death, I am all his own; if I die in my Lord's work, I die content."

Further, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *You do not yourself know.* I speak experimentally, using my own self as an instance in the work which God has enabled me to do. If it had been revealed to me that I should have enjoyed the opportunities which have fallen to my lot, I could never have believed it. If the Lord could use *me*, he can also use *you*. Only stand in a waiting posture,

saying, "Here am I, send me!" and you shall see things which you dare not expect. If the curtain could be withdrawn, and you could behold the future, you would exclaim, "Is thy servant born of angels that he should attempt such things as these?" I do not suppose Peter, James, and John had any inkling of what the Lord was going to do by them when they left their boats and nets at his call. John dreamed that one day he might sit on an earthly throne and his brother James on another, but this was not to be: yet have they obtained a nobler heritage. To each of us there is a share in the purposes of heaven, and this is a kingdom large enough. Who knoweth, brother or sister, whether thou art put in thy family to save thy family? Who knoweth whether thou art made to live in a back street to bless that street? Who knoweth whether thou art set down in a forlorn district to upraise that district? Who knoweth whether thou art put into that nation to save that nation? Ay, put into the world in Christ's name to save the world? Aspire to great things for God.

IV. Our fourth word is—CONFIDE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this, *be confident that thou art safe.* If God has brought Esther to the throne that she may go in unto the king and save her people; go in, good Esther! Fear not the risk. Fast and pray your three days before you go; but be not dismayed. If the womanhood in you trembles in the prospect of a possible death, let confidence in God override your fears. Ahasuerus cannot kill you; you cannot die: he can refuse his golden sceptre to all the princes of the empire, but not to you; for God has placed you where you are, and ordained you for his purpose. Rest assured if he had meant to destroy you he would not

have shown you such things as these. Fall back on his past mercy and be confident.

What is more, if God has a purpose to serve by a man that man will live out his day and *accomplish the divine design.* The more resistance he experiences the more surely will his life-work be achieved. If all the devils in hell rose up at once against a true, devoted servant of God, who has a work to do, in the name of the Lord he would drive them away as smoke before the wind. David said, "They compass me about like bees, yea, they compass me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them." It is a bad day for anybody when he opposes himself to the manifest destiny of one of the Lord's commissioned ones. I fall back often on the grand truth of predestination: it is no sleepy doctrine to me. If God's decree so runneth there is no altering it, and if he has purposed it there is no defeating it. Heaven and earth shall sooner fail than the eternal purpose. Each chosen servant of God is like the word which called him: as the word of the Lord does not return unto him void, but prospers in the thing whereto he hath sent it, even so shall it be with every servant of the Most High. A holy confidence in the divine purpose instead of making men grow stolid and idle may prove to be one of the mightiest impulses to the heroic life. Cromwell's Ironsides to a man believed in the everlasting purpose, therefore they were invincible, for no fear ever breathed upon them. Though the hosts of the tyrant may be innumerable, yet with the war cry, "The Lord of hosts is with us," we will ride forth conquering and to conquer. Settle it in your mind that the Lord has called you to the work, and then advance without question or fear. Put your hand to the plough, and pause not. Do the work with your might.

Do not stand asking how: do it as you can. Do not stand asking when: do it directly. Do not say, "But I am weak":—the Lord is strong. Do not say, "But I must devise methods." Do not concoct schemes or tarry to perfect your methods: fling yourself upon the work with all your might. Load your cannon with rough bits of rock or stones from the road if nothing better comes to hand; ram them in with plenty of powder; and apply the fire. When you have nothing else to hurl at the foe, place yourself in the gun. Believe me, no shot will be more effectual than the hurling of your whole being into the conflict. There was a man who strove in the House of Commons for what he thought would be a great boon to seamen, but he could not prevail. At last he broke through all the rules of the house and acted like a fanatic, and when everybody saw that the man was so in earnest that he was ready to faint and die, they said, "We must do something"; and it was done. An enthusiasm which overpowers yourself is likely to overpower others. Do not fail from want of fervor. Never mind if men think you crazy. When you are overwhelmed yourself the flood of zeal will bear all opposition before it. When you become so fanatically insane as to be absorbed by a passion for the glory of God, the salvation of men, the spread of truth, and the reclaiming of the fallen masses, there shall be about you the truest sanity, and the mightiest force. May you feel such a passion concerning missions to-day. May you feel that the gospel must be preached to all nations. May you feel that impulse at this moment while we worship God by giving our contributions to his cause.

V.

HUMILITY THE FRIEND OF PRAYER.

June 22, 1884.

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands."—GENESIS xxxii. 10.

JACOB'S character was far from faultless, but equally removed from despicable. He possessed great strength of character and force of judgment, and this became somewhat a snare to him, so that he did not always move through life with the childlike repose of Isaac, or the royal serenity of Abraham, but was at times crafty and pettifogging, like his relatives on the mother's side. Yet I demur to that depreciation of Jacob's character which is so common in certain quarters, because he used the means, as well as prayed. Our God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, *and of Jacob;* and very frequently he is called *the God of Israel*, and even *the God of Jacob.* "He is not ashamed to be called their God:" and if he is not ashamed to be called Jacob's God, no fellow-believer has any right to be ashamed of Jacob. With all his imperfections—and he certainly had them—he was a noble man. Some good people are built upon too small a scale to display either good or bad qualities in any high degree,—let not such carp at a great man like Jacob. He has impressed his character upon multitudinous generations, and a whole nation bears his lineaments. He was a man full of energy, active,

enduring, resolute, and hence his infirmities became more conspicuous than they would have been in a quieter and more restful nature.

Say what you will of him, he was a master of the art of prayer, and he that can pray well is a princely man. He that can prevail with God will certainly prevail with men. It seems to me that when once a man is taught of the Lord to pray he is equal to every emergency that can possibly arise. Depend upon it, it will go hard with any man who fights against a man of prayer. All other weapons may be dashed aside; but the weapon of All-prayer, invisible though it may be, and despised of the worldling, hath in it a might and majesty which will secure the victory. The sword of prayer hath such an edge that it will cut through coats of mail. Jacob was a prevailing prince when he came upon his knees.

Dr. Kitto, in his admirable Bible Illustrations, has a chapter upon this chapter which is entitled, "The First Prayer." I take leave to differ a little from that title. This can hardly be said to be the first prayer that is recorded in Scripture. I admit that the excellent writer excludes the prayer of Abraham for Sodom as rather an intercession than a prayer; but there are other prayers of Abraham, and other instances of supplication. Yet it may be truly said that this is the first prayer in the Bible of a man for himself, which is given at full length; and being the first, it may be viewed in some degree as a pattern for succeeding pleaders. If you examine it carefully, you will find that it is a valuable model which may be copied by any child of God in the day of his trouble. Jacob begins by pleading the covenant:—"O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac": what better plea can we have than the covenant of a faithful God, which he has already fulfilled to our fathers?

He next pleads a special promise which had been made to himself. That promise was wrapt up in the folds of a precept which he was obeying: "Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." While we plead the general covenant made with all believers in Christ, we may also particularly and especially plead any promise which has been laid home to our own soul by the Spirit of the blessed God. Next, he proceeded to plead his own unworthiness; by faith he turned even his faultiness into an argument, as I shall have to show you: "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." Furthermore, he went on to plead with God, stating his special danger: "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." He also set the little children and their danger before God—a strong plea with such a God of love as we have: "Lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Then he concluded with what must ever remain a potent plea with God: "Thou saidst." He urged God's promise, and virtually cried, "Do as thou hast said." It is wise to spread the promise before him who gave it, and to beg for its fulfillment. We may appeal to God's faithfulness, and cry, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."

The very first sentence of Jacob's prayer has this peculiarity about it, that *it is steeped in humility;* for he does not address the Lord as his own God at the first, but as the God of Abraham and Isaac. The prayer itself, though it is very urgent, is never presumptuous; it is as lowly as it is earnest. I take it that even when Jacob in his desperation grasped the angel, and said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," there was no undue familiarity in his holy boldness. There was an

extraordinary courage, and an invincible determination; but it was of the kind which God approves, otherwise he would not have blessed him there. No man wins a blessing through a sinful act towards God. Throughout this prayer I see, with all its intensity, a loving remembrance of who Jacob is, and who Jehovah is; and the suppliant speaks in terms fit to be used towards the thrice holy God by a man of lowly heart.

This is to be the subject of our discourse—*humility is the fit attitude of prayer.* We will begin with that—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Then we will advance in the second place to remark that *humility is promoted by the same considerations which encourage prayer*—that I shall show you from the text, and thirdly, *humility suggests and supplies many arguments which can be used in prayer.* A proud man has few reasons to bring before God; but the humbler a man is, the more numerous are his prevailing pleas. Prayer is a suitable employment for a sinner, and a sinner is the best person to exercise prayer.

I. Our first observation is that HUMILITY IS THE FIT ATTITUDE OF PRAYER. I do not think that Jacob could have prayed unless he had stripped off the robes of self-justification which he wore in his controversy with Laban, and had stood disrobed before the infinite majesty of the Most High.

Observe that he here speaks *not as before man, but as before God;* and he cries, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." He had been talking with Laban, —Laban who had made a slave of him, who had used him in the most mercenary manner, and who had now pursued him in fierce anger because he had quitted his service with his wives and children that he might go

back to his native country. To Laban he does not say, "I am not worthy of what I possess," for, as far as churlish Laban was concerned, he was worthy of a great deal more than had ever been rendered to him in the form of wage. To Laban he uses many truthful sentences of self-vindication and justification. Laban's substance had greatly increased under Jacob's unceasing care. He cared for Laban's flocks with constant diligence, and he says, "in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." He declares that he had never taken a ram of the flock wherewith to feed his own family; that he had, in fact, for many years worked with no wages except the daughters who became his wives; and he goes the length of saying, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." The same man who speaks in that fashion to Laban turns round and confesses to his God, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." This is perfectly consistent and truthful. Humility is not telling falsehoods against yourself: humility is forming a right estimate of yourself. As towards Laban it was a correct estimate for a man who had worked so hard for so little to claim that he had a right to what God had given him; and yet as before God it was perfectly honest and sincere of Jacob to say, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Now, whenever you go to prayer, if you have previously been compelled to say some rather strong thing as to your own integrity and industry; or, if you have heard others speak in your praise, forget it all; for you cannot pray if it has any effect upon you. A man cannot pray with a good opinion of himself: all he can manage is just to mutter, "God, I

thank thee, that I am not as other men are," and that is no prayer at all. A lofty view of your own excellence will tempt you to look down with contempt upon your neighbor; and that is death to prayer. God drives out of his temple all proud prayers: he cannot endure such provocations. Thou must put thy shoe from off thy foot when thou standest on holy ground,—that same shoe which it is quite right for thee to wear when thou hast to tread upon the lion and the dragon,—that same shoe which fits thee well, and which it befits thee to wear when travelling through this great and terrible wilderness. Put off before thy God even that which thou art forced to wear before churlish men. When we see Jesus we say of him, "whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." "Lord, I am not worthy," is our cry. Like Abraham, we acknowledge that we are but dust and ashes; less than the least of all saints; honored by being allowed to discharge any menial function in our Master's house. See, then, that it was essential for Jacob to get into his right attitude after having disputed with Laban. It was fit that in lifting his eyes to heaven he should use the lowliest language, and by no means pretend to any desert in the presence of the thrice Holy One.

Brethren, *it would ill become any of us to use the language of merit before God;* for merit we have none; and if we had any, we should not need to pray. It has been well observed by an old divine, that the man who pleads his own merit does not pray, but demands his due. If I ask a man to pay me a debt, I am not a suppliant, but a plaintiff claiming my rights. The prayer of a man who thinks he is meritorious is like serving the Lord with a writ: it is not offering a request, it is issuing a demand. Merit in effect says, "Pay me that thou owest." Little will such a man get of God; for if the

Lord only pays to us what he owes us, yonder place of torment will be our speedy heritage. If while living here we receive no more than we deserve, we shall be offcasts and outcasts. The meanest of mendicants obtain more than their deserts. Even life itself is a gift from the Creator; "wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Let us be brought low as we may, we still must own that "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Any other attitude but that of humility would be most unbecoming and presumptuous in the presence of the Most High.

Let me add, also, that *in times of great pressure upon the heart there is not much fear of self-righteousness intruding.* Jacob was greatly afraid and sore distressed; and when a man is brought into such a state the lowliest language suits him. They that are filled with bread may boast, but the hungry beg. Let the proud take heed lest while the bread is yet in their mouths the wrath of God come upon them. He that is brought to penury, he that is distressed in spirit, he that lies at death's door, is not a man to show the peacock's feather and display his finery. Then he looks about him to the loving-kindness of the Lord, and he pleads for mercy. This is his one cry—"Mercy, mercy." He finds that he cannot pray until he has come to his true standing as an undeserving one; but having reached that he has a firm foothold, for he pleads the absolute sovereignty of divine grace, and the boundless love of the divine heart as substantial arguments for mercy. I am persuaded that in our prayers we fail at times because we do not get low enough. On thy face before the throne thou shalt prevail. If thou hast any righteousness of thine own, thou shalt never have Christ's righteousness. If thou hast no

sin, thou shalt have no washing in the precious blood. If thou art strong, thou shalt be left to thine own weakness. If thou art rich and increased in goods, thou shalt be sent empty away. But when thou canst truly confess thy nothingness, and lie low before God, he must hear thee. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." No prayers speed better in the heights than those which rise from the depths. When thou art naked the Lord will clothe thee; when thou art hungry he will feed thee; when thou art nothing he will be thine all in all; for then it is that he will win glory to himself, and his mercies will not be perverted to feed thy pride. When our mercies magnify the Lord we shall have many of them, but when we use them for the magnifying of our own selves they will depart from us. See then, dear friend, how necessary it is that we should approach the Lord in the attitude of humility.

I call your attention to the present tense as it is used in the text—Jacob does not say, as we might half have thought he would have said, "I *was* not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast made to pass before thy servant," but he says, "I *am not* worthy." He does not merely allude to his unworthiness when he crossed this Jordan with a staff in his hand, a poor solitary banished man: he believes that he was unworthy then; but even now, looking upon his flocks and his herds and his great family, and all that he had done and suffered, he cries, "*I am not* worthy." What, has not all God's mercy made you worthy? Brethren, free grace is neither the child nor the father of human worthiness. If we get all the grace we ever can get we shall never be worthy of that grace; for grace as it enters where there is no worthiness, so it imparts to us no worthiness afterwards as we are judged before

God. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; we have only done what it was our duty to have done. I cannot bear the man who, in his foolish prattle about his own perfection, talks as if he had become worthy of grace. The Lord have mercy upon such boasters, and bring them to the true moorings, so that they may own that they are not worthy. When you and I shall get to heaven, though God may say, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy," yet it will never be right for any one of us to say that we are worthy of anything that God has bestowed upon us. Our psalm must be *Non nobis Domine:*—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." To touch the praise which comes to us through the operations of divine grace, even with our little finger, were treason against the Most High. To assume for a moment that we deserve anything of the Lord God, is so vain-glorious, so false, so unjust that we ought to loathe the very thought of it, and cry like Jacob, "I am not worthy." Job, who had defended himself with vigor and possibly with bitterness, no sooner heard God speaking to him in the whirlwind than he cried, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Prostrate before the throne is the proper attitude of prayer: in humility is our strength for supplication.

II. Secondly, the same thought will be kept up, but put in a somewhat differing light, while we note that THOSE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MAKE TOWARDS HUMILITY ARE THE STRENGTH OF PRAYER.

Observe, first, that Jacob in this prayer showed his humility by *a confession of the Lord's working in all his prosperity.* He says with a full heart, "All the mercies

and all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Well but, Jacob, you have immense flocks of sheep, but you earned them, and through your care they greatly increased: do you not consider that those flocks are entirely your own procuring? Surely you must see that you were highly industrious, prudent, and careful, and thus grew wealthy? No; he takes a survey of his great estate, and he speaks of it all as *mercies*,—mercies which the Lord had shewed unto his servant. I do not object to books about *self-made men*, but I am afraid that self-made men have a great tendency to worship him that made them. It is very natural they should. But, brethren, if we are self-made, I am sure we had a very bad maker, and there must be a great many flaws in us. It would be better to be ground back to dust again, and made over anew so as to become God-made men. Listen, O proud self-made mortal! What if thou hast earned everything, who gave thee strength to earn it? What if thy success be due to thy shrewd sense, who gave thee skill and foresight? What if thou hast been frugal and industrious, yet why wast thou not left to be as prodigal as others, and to waste in riot what God bestowed on thee? Oh, sir, if thou art lifted an inch above the dunghill thou shouldst bless God for it, for it is from the dunghill thou hast come. God helps his servants while they are weak, but when they fancy themselves strong, he frequently humbles them. When we cry, "Behold this great Babylon that I have builded," God may not cast us off, but he will cast us down. He did not cast off Nebuchadnezzar, but he did allow him to lose his reason and mingle with the beasts of the field. If we act brutishly, the Lord may allow us to become like beasts in other matters. The use of our reasoning powers is a boon of heavenly charity which should lead us to deep

gratitude, but never induce in us pride as to our superior abilities. If we are out of Bedlam we ought to bless the Lord in the humblest manner. Shall we dare to glory in our talents? Shall the axe boast against him that heweth therewith? Shall the net exalt itself against the fisherman who drags the sea therewith? That were, indeed, a folly, a God-provoking folly. Inasmuch as God does so much for us, we ought to be humbled by the weight of obligation which love heaps upon us.

This may also yield us a hold upon God in prayer, for now we can say, "Lord, thou hast done all this for me: it is plain that thy hand has been in all thy servant's happiness; let thy hand be with me still." Oh, self-made man, when you have made yourself, can you keep yourself and preserve yourself in being? And do you hope to get to heaven and throw up your cap and say, "Hosanna to myself"? Do you reckon upon such vainglory? If you seek your own glory you shall find no place in that city where God's glory is the all-pervading bliss of the place. So, then, that which tends to keep us humble also becomes an assistance to us in our prayer.

The next point is *a consideration of God's mercies.* For my part, nothing ever sinks me so low as the mercy of God, and next to that I am readily subdued by the kindness of men. When the clarion rings out for battle I will stand foot to foot with him that dare encounter me, and all the man within me is aroused to the conflict; but when all is peace and quiet, and everyone wishes me well, I wonder at their kindness, and I sink into my shoes with fear lest I should act in any way unworthily. The man who has a due sense of his own character will be laid low by words of commendation. When we remember the loving-kindness of the Lord to us we cannot but contrast our littleness with the greatness of his

love, and feel a sense of self-debasement. It is written, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." The words are true to the letter. Take a case: Peter went a fishing; and if he had caught a few fish, his boat would have floated high on the lake; but when the Master came into the boat and told him where to throw the net so that he pulled up a multitude of fish, then the little barque began to sink. Down, down, it went, and poor Peter went down with it, till he fell at Jesus' feet and cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He was confused and overwhelmed, or he would never have asked the blessed Master to leave him: Christ's goodness had fairly beaten him till he was afraid of his Benefactor. Know ye not what it is to be weighted down with infinite goodness, oppressed with mercy, swept away by an avalanche of love. I, at least, know what it means, and I know of no experience which has made me so little in mine own eyes.

I feel less than the least of all his mercies; I shrink, and tremble in the presence of his bounty. If even providential goodness does this, you may be sure that redeeming love will be even more effectual. Here is a proud sinner, boasting of his own righteousness; you cannot get his self-glorying out of him; but by-and-by he learns that the Son of God gave his life to redeem him, poured out his heart upon Calvary's cross, the just for the unjust, to bring him to God; and now he is of another mind. No man could ever think that he deserved that the Son of God should die for him. If he does think so, he must be out of his mind. Dying love touches the heart, and the man cries, "Lord, I am not worthy of a drop of thy precious blood; I am not worthy of a sigh from thy sacred heart; I am not worthy that thou

shouldest have lived on earth for me, much less that thou shouldest have died for me." A sense of that wondrous condescension which is the highest commendation of God's love, that in due time Christ died for the ungodly, brings the man down upon his knees, dissolved by the mercies of God. Now, if there is any man here who has a good hope through grace that by-and-by he will be with God in heaven, if he will meditate upon the beatific vision, if he will picture to himself the crown upon his head, and the palm branch in his hand, and himself enjoying the everlasting hallelujah,

> "Far from a world of grief and sin,
> With God eternally shut in";

why, the next thing he will do is to sit down and weep that this can be possible to him. Such a poor, useless, sinful soul as I am, can I be glorified, and has Jesus gone to prepare a place for me? Does he give me his own assurance that he will come again, and receive me to himself? Am I a joint heir with Christ, and a favored child of God? This makes us lose ourselves in adoring gratitude. Oh, sirs, we can never open our mouth again in the way of boasting; our pride is drowned in this sea of mercy. If we had a little Saviour, and a little heaven, and little mercy we might still hang out our flags; but with a great Saviour, and great mercy, and a great heaven we can only go in like David, and sit before the Lord, and say, "Whence is this to me?" I have a dear brother in Christ who is now sore sick, the Rev. Mr. Curme, the vicar of Sandford, in Oxfordshire, who has been my dear friend for many years. He is the mirror of humility, and he divides his name into two words, *Cur me?* which means, "Why me?" Often did he say, in my hearing, "Why me, Lord? Why me?" Truly I can say the same, *Cur me?*

> "Why was I made to hear thy voice,
> And enter where there's room;
> While thousands make a wretched choice
> And rather starve than come?"

This exceeding kindness of the Lord all tends to promote humility, and at the same time to help us in prayer; for if the Lord be so greatly good, we may adopt the language of the Phœnecian woman when the Master said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She answered, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." So we will go and ask our Lord to give us crumbs of mercy, and they will be enough for us poor dogs. God's crumbs are bigger than man's loaves; and if he gives us what to him may be a crumb, it shall be a meal to us. Oh, he is a great Giver! He is a glorious Giver! We are not equal to his least gift! We cannot estimate his least mercy, nor describe it fully, nor praise him for it sufficiently. His shallows are too deep for us; his mole-hill mercies overtop us; what shall we say of his mountain mercies?

Again, *a comparison of our past and our present* will tend to humility and also to helpfulness in prayer. Jacob at first is described thus, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan." He is all alone, no servant attends him; he has no goods, not even a change of linen in a parcel, nothing but a staff to walk with; now, after a few years, here is Jacob coming back, crossing the river in the opposite direction, and he has with him two bands. He is a large grazier, with great wealth in all manner of cattle. What a change. I would have those men whom God has prospered never to be ashamed of what they used to be; they ought never to forget the staff with which they crossed this Jordan. I had a good friend who preserved

the axle-tree of the truck in which he wheeled home his goods when he first came to London. It was placed over his front door, and he never blushed to tell how he came up from the country, worked hard, and made his way in the world. I like this a deal better than the affected gentility which forgets the lone half-crown which pined in solitude in their pockets when they entered this city. They are indignant if you remind them of their poor old father in the country, for they have discovered that the family is very ancient and honorable; in fact, one of their ancestors came over with the Conqueror. I have never felt any wish to be related to that set of vagabonds; but tastes differ, and there are some who think that they must be superior beings because they are descended from Norman freebooters. Nobodies suddenly swell as if they were everybody. Observe that Jacob does not say, "Years ago I was at home with my father Isaac, a man of large estate." Nor does he talk of his grandfather Abraham as a nobleman of an ancient family in Ur, of the Chaldees, who was entertained by monarchs. No, he was not so silly as to boast of aristocracy and wealth, but he frankly owns his early poverty:—"With my staff, a poor, lonely, friendless man, I crossed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." It humbles him to think of what he was, but at the same time it strengthens him in prayer; for in effect he pleads, "Lord, hast thou made two bands of me that Esau may have the more to destroy? Hast thou given me these children that they may fall by the sword?" So again I say, that which humbled also encouraged him: he found his strength in prayer in those very things which furnished motives for lowliness.

III. And now, as time flies, we must dwell upon the third point, still hammering the same nail on

the head: TRUE HUMILITY SUPPLIES US WITH ARGUMENTS IN PRAYER.

Look at the first one, "*I am not worthy* of all thy mercies;" nay, "I am not worthy of the least of all the many mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant. Thou hast kept thy word and been true to me, but it was not because I was true to thee. I am not worthy of the truth which thou hast shewn to thy servant." Is there not power in such a prayer? Is not mercy secured by a confession of unworthiness? The man whom Christ most of all commended, as far as I remember, was he who used this very language. The centurion came to Christ and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof"; yet this was he of whom the Lord said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Depend on it, if you want Christ's commendation you must be lowly in your own esteem; for he never praises the proud, but he honors the humble. Since the Lord was thus gracious to him when he was unworthy, had not Jacob splendid ground to stand upon while he wrestled with God, and cried, Deliver me from Esau, my brother, though because of the wrong I did him I am not worthy of such deliverance? We are always afraid in our time of trouble that God will deal with us according to our unworthiness: but he will not. We say to ourselves, "At last the sins of my youth have come home to me; now I shall be dealt with according to my iniquities!" But Jacob virtually said, "Lord, I never was worthy of the least thing that thou hast done for me, and all thy dealings to me are in pure grace. I stand still where I always must stand, a debtor to thy sovereign undeserved favor; and I appeal to thee,—since thou hast done all this for me, an undeserving one, I beseech thee, do yet more. I have not changed, for I

am as undeserving as ever, and thou hast not changed, for thou art as good as ever, therefore still deliver thy servant." This is mighty pleading with the Most High.

Then please to notice that while Jacob thus pleads his own unworthiness he is not slow to plead *God's goodness.* He speaks in most impressive words, wide and full of meaning. "I am not worthy of the least of *all thy mercies.* I cannot enumerate them, the list would be too long! It seems to me as if thou hadst given me all kinds of mercies, every sort of blessing. Thy mercy endureth for ever, and thou hast given it all to me." How he extols God as with a full mouth when he says, "All thy mercies." He does not say, "all thy mercy"—the word is in the plural—"the least of all thy *mercies.*" For God has many bands of mercies; favors never come alone, they visit us in troops. All the trees in God's vineyard are full of boughs, and each bough is loaded with fruit. All the flowers in God's garden bloom double, and some of them bloom sevenfold. We have not mercy only, but mercies numerous as the sand. Mercy for the past, the present, the future; mercy to temper sorrows, mercy to purify joys; mercy for our sinful things, mercy for our holy things. "All thy mercies"; the expression has a vast acreage of meaning. He does not know how to express his sense of obligation except with plurals and universals: the language is so full I could never exhibit all its meaning. He seems to say to the Lord, "Because of all this great goodness, I pray thee go on to deal well with thy servant. Save me from Esau, or all thy mercies will be lost. Hast thou not in thy past love given pledge to me to keep me even to the end?" Mercy and truth all through the Bible are continually joined together, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." "God shall send forth

his mercy and his truth." These two gracious ones grasp hands in Jacob's prayer—"All thy mercies and all thy truth." Oh, brethren, if you would wrestle with God and prevail, use much these two master arguments, mercies and truth. These are two keys which will open all the treasures of God; these are two shields behind which you will be out of reach of every fiery arrow. That which made Jacob humble, also made him strong in prayer. Gratitude for mercy made him bow before God, but it also enabled him to grasp the angel with the hand of believing importunity.

Notice, next, how he says "*thy servant.*" A plea is hidden away in that word. Jacob might have called himself by some other name on this occasion. He might have said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy *child*": it would have been true, it would not have been fitting. Suppose it had run—"Unto *thy chosen*," it would have been true, but not so lowly; or "unto *thy covenanted one*,"—that would have been correct, but not so humble an expression as Jacob felt bound to use in this time of his distress, when the sins of his youth were brought to his mind. He seemed to say, "Lord, I am thy servant. Thou didst bid me come hither, and hither I have come because of that bidding: therefore protect me." Surely a king will not see his servant put upon when engaged in the royal service. Jacob was in the path of duty, and God would make it the path of safety. If we make God our guide, he will be our guard. If he be our Commander he will be our Defender. He will not permit any Esau to smite with the sword one of his Jacobs. When we fully cast ourselves upon the Lord by a believing obedience, we may depend upon it that he will bear us up and bear us

through. Masters are commanded to give unto their servants that which is just and equal, and we may be sure that our Master in heaven will do the same to each of us who serve him. Jacob was in danger through his service, and therefore the Lord's honor was pledged to see him through. It may seem a small thing to be a servant, but it is a great thing to plead in the hour of need; so David used it: "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." "Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble." "O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee." These are but specimens of the ways in which men of God used their position as servants as an argument for mercy.

Jacob had yet another plea which showed his humility, and that was *the argument of facts.* "With my staff," says he, "I passed over this Jordan." "This Jordan," which flowed hard by, and received the Jabbok. It brings a thousand things to his mind, to be on the old spot again. When he crossed it before he was journeying into exile, but now he is coming back as a son, to take his place with loved Rebekah and father Isaac, and he could not but feel it a great mercy that he was now going in a happier direction than before. He looked at his staff, and he remembered how in fear and trembling he had leaned upon it as he pursued his hasty, lonely march. "With this staff—that is all I had." He looks upon it, and contrasts his present condition and his two camps with that day of poverty, that hour of hasty flight. This retrospect humbled him, but it must have been a strength to him in prayer. "O God, if thou hast helped me from abject want to all this wealth, thou canst certainly preserve me in the present danger. He who has done so much is still able to bless me, and he will do so."

"Can he have taught me to trust in his name,
And thus far have brought me to bring me to shame?"

Does God mock men? Does he encourage their hope and then leave them? No, the God that begins to bless perseveres in blessing, and even to the end continues to love his chosen.

In closing, I think I discover one powerful argument here in Jacob's prayer. Did he not mean that although God had increased him so greatly, there had come with it *all the greater responsibility?* He had more to care for than when he owned less. Duty had increased with increased possessions. He seems to say, "Lord, when I came this way before I had nothing, only a staff; that was all I had to take care of; and if I had lost that staff I could have found another. Then I had thy dear and kind protection, which was better to me than riches. Shall I not have it still? When I was a single man with a staff thou didst guard me, and now that I am surrounded by this numerous family of little children and servants, wilt thou not spread thy wings over me? Lord, the gifts of thy goodness increase my necessity: give me proportionately thy blessing. I could before run away and escape from my angry brother; but now the mothers and the children bind me, and I must abide with them and die with them unless thou preserve me." My brethren, at this hour I know how to use this self-same plea. To me every advance in position among men means more obligation to serve my Lord and bless my generation. I need more grace, or my failure will be the more shameful. Unworthy as we are of all this blessing, yet we dare not trifle with it, and refuse to serve our God with all our powers. The more oxen the more ploughing has to be done; the broader the fields

the more laboriously must we sow; the larger the harvest the more industriously must we reap; for all this we need much more strength. If God blesses and increases us in talent, or in substance, or in any way, ought we not to conclude that the larger trust involves greater responsibility? Thus our life's task grows sterner, and more difficult, and we are driven more than ever to our God. This is our argument:—"O Lord, thou hast imposed upon me a wider service; give me more grace. In thy goodness thou hast committed more talents to him that had ten talents; wilt thou not give more help to put all out to interest for thy name's sake?" Yes, brother, as God uplifts you, take care that you bow lower and lower at his feet. Consecrate even more entirely your whole being unto God. Be thankful if your pound has gained one pound; and if he doth more for you, be restless till his five pounds have gained five other pounds. Let the goodness of God, instead of becoming a cloke for your pride, or a couch for your sloth, be an incentive to your industry, a stimulus to your zeal. May it help your humility, but at the same time encourage your confidence when you draw near to God in prayer, to feel how largely you are under obligations to serve the Lord.

Come, dear friends, the Lord hath been mindful of us as a church, and he will bless us. We have obtained, through our Lord Jesus and his Spirit, blessings so large that I can say in your name, we are not worthy of the least of all these mercies. Shall we not use them to God's glory? Yes, more than ever: for we are determined to pray more, and to believe more, and to work more, and to be more full of courage and dauntless resolve that the name and the truth of Jesus shall be made known wherever our voice can be heard. As long as

tongues can speak and hearts can beat, God helping us, we will live for Jesus our Lord. We are what Rutherford would call "drowned debtors"; let us be living lovers. Our ships have gone down in a sea of love till mercy rolls over our topmasts. So be it. So be it. We are swallowed up in an abyss of love. My figure describes us as sinking, but in very truth it is thus we rise by being filled with all the fulness of God. With a full heart I pray for you, beloved. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

VI.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA.

July 6, 1884.

"Joseph of Arimathæa, an honorable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre."—MARK xv. 43–46.

IT was a very dark day with the church of God and with the cause of Christ; for the Lord Jesus was dead, and so the sun of their souls had set. "All the disciples forsook him, and fled." "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," were the sad words of Jesus, and they had come true. He was dead upon the cross and his enemies hoped that there was an end of him, while his friends feared that it was even so. A few women who had remained about the cross, true to the very last, were found faithful unto death; but what could they do to obtain his sacred body and give it honorable burial? That priceless flesh seemed to be in danger of the fate which usually awaited the bodies of malefactors: at any rate, the fear was that it might be hurled into the first grave that could be found to shelter it. At that perilous moment Joseph of Arimathæa, a city of the Jews, of whom we never heard before, and of whom

we never hear again, suddenly made his appearance. He was the very man needed for the occasion, a man of influence, a man possessing that kind of influence which was most potent with Pilate—a rich man, a counsellor, a member of the Sanhedrim, a person of weight and character. Every evangelist mentions him and tells us something about him, and from these we learn that he was a disciple, "a good man and a just; who also himself waited for the kingdom of God." Joseph had been retiring, and probably cowardly before; but now he came to the cross, and saw how matters stood, and then went in boldly unto Pilate, craved the body of Jesus, and obtained it. Let us learn from this that God will always have his witnesses. It matters not though the ministry should forsake the truth, though they that should be leaders should become recreant, the truth of God will not fail for lack of friends. It may be with the church as when a standard-bearer fainteth and the host is ready to melt with dismay; but there shall be found other standard-bearers, and the banner of the Lord shall wave over all. As the Lord liveth, so shall his truth live: as God reigneth, so shall the gospel reign, even though it be from the cross. "Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth from the tree." Such is a singular version of a verse in the Psalms, and it contains a glorious truth. Even while Jesus hangeth on the cross in death he is still keeping possession of the throne, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Let this be remembered for your encouragement in the cloudy and dark day. If you live in any place where the faithful fail from among men, do not wring your hands in grief and sit down in despair, as though it was all over with the cause you love. The Lord liveth, and he will yet keep a faithful seed alive in the earth. Another

Joseph of Arimathæa will come forward at the desperate moment: just when we cannot do without him the man will be found. There was a Joseph for Israel in Egypt, and there was a Joseph for Jesus on the cross. A Joseph acted to him a father's part at his birth, and another Joseph arranged for his burial. The Lord shall not be left without friends. There was a dark day in the Old Testament history when the eyes of Eli, the servant of God, had failed him; and worse still, he was almost as blind mentally as physically; for his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. It seemed as if God must forsake his Israel. But who is this little boy who is brought in by his mother? this tiny child who is to be left in the sanctuary to serve his God as long as he liveth? this pretty little man who wears the little coat which his mother's hands have lovingly made for him? Look, ye that have eyes of faith; for the prophet Samuel is before you, the servant of the Lord, by whose holy example Israel shall be led to better things, and delivered from the oppression which chastised the iniquities of Eli's sons.

God hath to-day somewhere, I know not where, in yon obscure cottage of an English village, or in a log-hut far away in the backwoods of America, or in the slums of our back streets, or in our palaces, a man who in maturer life shall deliver Israel, fighting the battles of the Lord. The Lord hath his servant making ready, and when the time shall come, when the hour shall want the man, the man shall be found for the hour. The Lord's will shall be done, let infidels and doubters think what they please. I see in this advent of Joseph of Arimathæa exactly at the needed time, a well of consolation for all who have the cause of God laid upon their hearts. We need not worry our heads about who is to

succeed the pastors and evangelists of to-day: the apostolical succession we may safely leave with our God.

Concerning this Joseph of Arimathæa, the honorable counsellor, I want to speak this morning, praying that I may speak to your souls all along. As I have already said, we hear no more of Joseph than what is recorded here. He shines out when he is wanted, and anon he disappears: his record is on high. We need not mention the traditions about him, for I think that even the quotation of legends has an evil tendency, and may turn us aside from the pure, unadulterated Word of God. What have you and I to do with tradition? Is not the Scripture enough? There is probably no truth in the silly tales about Joseph and Glastonbury; and if there were it could be of no consequence to us; if any fact had been worthy of the pen of inspiration, it would have been written, and because it is not written, we need not desire to know. Let us be satisfied to pause where the Holy Spirit stays his pen.

I shall use Joseph of Arimathæa this morning in four ways: first, as *our warning*,—he was a disciple of Jesus, "but secretly for fear of the Jews;" secondly, for *our instruction*,—he was at last brought out by the cross, concerning which holy Simeon had declared that by the death of the Lord Jesus the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed; thirdly, for *our arousing*,—there was an occasion for Joseph to come forward, and there is occasion now for all the timid to grow brave; and lastly, for *our guidance*,—that we may, if we have been at all bashful and fearful, come forward in the hour of need and behave ourselves as bravely as Joseph of Arimathæa did on the eve before the Paschal Sabbath.

I. First, then, I desire to look at Joseph of Arimathæa as OUR WARNING. He was a disciple of Christ, but secretly,

for fear of the Jews: we do not advise any one of you to imitate Joseph in that. Fear which leads us to conceal our faith is an evil thing. Be a disciple by all means, but not secretly: you miss a great part of your life's purpose if you are. Above all, do not be a disciple secretly because of the fear of man: for the fear of man bringeth a snare. If you are the slave of such fear it demeans you, be-littles you, and prevents your giving due glory to God.

> "Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear."

Be careful to give honor to Christ and he will take care of your honor. Why was it that Joseph of Arimathæa was so backward? Perhaps it was owing to *his natural disposition.* Many men are by nature very bold; some are a little too much so, for they become intrusive, self-assertive, not to say impudent. I have heard of a certain class of persons who "rush in where angels fear to tread." They are fearless because they are brainless. Let us avoid fault in that direction. Many, on the other hand, are too retiring: they have to screw their courage up even to say a good word for the Saviour whom they love. If they can do so they fall into the rear rank; they hope to be found among the victors when they divide the spoil, but they are not over ambitious to be among the warriors while they are braving the foe. Some of these are true-hearted notwithstanding their timidity. It was found in the martyr days that certain of those who endured most bravely at the stake were naturally of a fearful mind. It is noted by Foxe that some who boasted of how well they could bear pain and death for Christ turned tail and recanted; while others who in prison trembled at the thought of

the fire, played the man in death, to the admiration of all that were round about them. Still, dear friends, it is not a desirable thing if you are troubled with timidity to foster it at all. Fear of man is a plant to be rooted up, and not to be nurtured. I should set that plant, if I could, where it would get but little water, and no sunshine, and meanwhile I would beg a cutting from a better tree. Would it not be well often to brace ourselves with such a hymn as this—

"Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own his cause,
Or blush to speak his name?

"Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease;
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail'd through bloody seas?"

If you know that your temptation lies in the direction of fear, watch and strive against it, and school yourselves evermore to dauntless courage by the help of the Holy Spirit.

I am afraid, too, that what helped to intimidate Joseph of Arimathæa was the fact that he was *a rich man.* A sad truth lies within our Lord's solemn exclamation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." Riches do not strengthen the heart, or make men daring for the good cause. Albeit wealth is a great talent which may be well used by the man who has entered into the kingdom of heaven, yet it brings with it snares and temptations, and when a man has not yet entered into the kingdom it is, in many ways, a terrible hindrance to his entrance. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,

than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom." The fishermen of the Galilean Lake readily left their bits of boats, and their fishing-tackle; but Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man, and was therefore slow to leave all for Christ's sake. The tendency of great possessions is seen in the case of the young man who turned away in sorrow from the Lord Jesus, when put to the unusual test of selling all he had. Strong swimmers have saved their lives when the ship has struck upon a rock, by casting aside every weight; while others have gone straight down to the bottom because they have bound their gold around their waists. Gold sinks men as surely as lead. Take care, any of you that are well-to-do in this world, that you do not permit the liberality of God to be a cause of disloyalty to him. Beware of the pride of life, the lust for rank, the desire to hoard; for any of these may prevent your service of your Lord. Riches puff men up, and prevent their stooping to find the pearl of great price. A poor man enters a humble village sanctuary where Christ is preached, and he finds eternal life; another man under concern of soul in the same village does not like to go down to the poor conventicle, and remains unblest. He keeps away because he puts to himself the question, "What will the people say if the squire goes to hear the gospel? What a stir there will be if the son of a lord is converted!" Joseph of Arimathæa's wealth made him unduly cautious; and possibly, without his knowing it, prevented his casting in his lot with the common sort of people who followed the Lord Jesus. His heart was for the prize, but the heavy weight of his substance hindered him in his race; it was an instance of abounding grace that he was helped to run well at the last.

Possibly, too, he may have been checked by the fact that *he was in office, and that he was honorable in it.* It

needs great grace to carry human honor; and, truth to tell, it is not particularly much worth carrying when you have it. For what is fame but the breath of men's nostrils? Poor stuff to feed a soul upon! If a man could so live as to gain universal plaudits, if he could write his name athwart the sky in letters of gold, what of it all? What is there in the applause of a thoughtless multitude? The approbation of good men, if it be gained by persevering virtue, is better to be desired than great riches; but even then it may become a temptation; for the man may begin to question rather, What will people say? than, What will God say? and the moment he falls into that mood he has introduced a weakening element into his life. The "Well done, good and faithful servant," of the Master's own lip is worth ten thousand thunders of applause from senators and princes. Honor among men is, at best, a peril to the best. Joseph was honored in council, and this is apt to make a man prudently slow. The tendency of office is towards caution rather than enthusiasm. I would have those placed in high positions remember this, and candidly judge themselves as to whether their shrinking from the public avowal of Christ may not be a cowardice unworthy of the position in which the Lord has placed them.

It seems clear that all the earthly things which men covet may not be so desirable as they appear to be; and that which men would give their eyes to procure, they might, if their eyes were opened, think far less of.

I would lovingly enquire of you at this time (for the sermon is meant to be personal all the way through) if any of you who love my Lord and Master are doing so secretly because of the fear of men. You have never openly confessed your faith, and why not? What doth hinder your taking up a decided position on the Lord's

side? Are you wealthy? Are you honorable? Do you occupy an enviable position in society? And are you such a mean-spirited creature that you have become proud of these glittering surroundings, like a child that is vain of its new frock? Are you so craven that you will not cast in your lot with the followers of truth and righteousness because they are persons of low degree? Are you really so base? Is there no holy chivalry in you? Can it be so, that, because God has dealt so well with you, and trusted you so generously, you will repay him by denying his Son, violating your conscience, and turning your back on truth; and all for the sake of being in the fashion? I know it may seem hard to receive the cold shoulder in society, or to have the finger of scorn pointed at you; but to bow before this selfish dread is scarcely worthy of a man, and utterly disgraceful to a Christian man. "Oh, but I am so retiring in disposition." Yes, but do not indulge it, I pray you; for, if all were of such a mind, where were the noble advances of truth, her reformations, her revivals? Where would have been our Luther, or our Calvin, or our Zwingle? where would have been our Whitefield, or our Wesley, if they had thought it to be the main object of desire to walk at ease along the cool sequestered vale of life? Come forth, my brother, for the truth and for the Lord. Recollect that what is right for you would be right for the rest of us: if you do not join the Christian church, for instance, every one of us might also neglect that duty, and where would be the visible church of Christ, and how would the ordinances of our holy faith be kept up as a witness among the sons of men? I charge all concealed believers to think over the inconsistency of their concealment and to quit that cowardly condition.

I feel sure that Joseph of Arimathæa was a great

loser by his secrecy; for you see, he did not live with Jesus, as many other disciples did. During that brief but golden period in which men walked and talked, and ate and drank with Jesus, Joseph was not with him. He was not among the twelve: as possibly he might have been if he had possessed more courage and decision. He lost many of those familiar talks with which the Lord indulged his own after the multitudes had been sent away. He missed that sacred training and strengthening which fitted men for the noble lives of primitive saints. How many opportunities he must have missed, too, of working for the Master and with the Master! Perhaps we hear no more of him because he had done no more. Possibly that one grand action which has redeemed his name from forgetfulness, is all that is recorded because it really was all that was worth recording. Joseph must have been a weaker, a sadder, a less useful man for having followed Christ afar off. I would to God that such reflections as these would fetch out our beloved, truly faithful and honorable Christian men, who hitherto have hidden away among the stuff, and have not come to the front to stand up for Jesus.

II. Secondly, having viewed Joseph of Arimathæa as a warning, I shall go on to speak of him as a lesson for OUR INSTRUCTION.

Joseph did come out after all; and so will you, my friends. If you are honest and sincere, you will have to avow your Lord sooner or later. Do you not think it would be better to make it sooner rather than later? The day will come when that shame which you are now dreading will be yours. As surely as you are a sincere believer, you will have to encounter that reproach and derision which now alarm you: why not face them at once and get it over? You will have to

confess Christ before many witnesses, why not begin to do so at once? What is the hardship of it? It will come easier to you, and it will bring you a larger blessing, and it will be sweeter in the recollection afterwards, than if you keep on postponing it. What was it that fetched Joseph of Arimathæa out? *It was the power of the cross!* Is it not a remarkable thing that all the life of Christ did not draw out an open avowal from this man? Our Lord's miracles, his marvellous discourses, his poverty, and self-renunciation, his glorious life of holiness and benevolence, all may have helped to build up Joseph in his secret faith, but it did not suffice to develop in him a bold avowal of faith. The shameful death of the cross had greater power over Joseph than all the beauty of Christ's life. Now let us see, you timid, backward ones, whether the cross will not have the same influence over you to-day. I believe it will if you carefully study it. I am sure it will if the Holy Spirit lays it home to your heart. I suppose that to Joseph of Arimathæa Christ's death on the cross seemed such *a wicked thing* that he must come out on behalf of one so evil entreated. He had not consented to the deed of the men of the Sanhedrim when they condemned Jesus to death; probably he and Nicodemus withdrew themselves from the assembly altogether; but when he saw that the crime was actually committed, and that the innocent man had been put to death, then he said, "I cannot be a silent witness of such a murder. I must now side with the holy and the just." Therefore he came out, and was found the willing servant of his crucified Master. Come what may of it, he felt that he must own himself to be on the right side, now that they had maliciously taken away the life of the Lord Jesus. It was late, it was sadly late, but it was not too late.

Oh, secret disciple, will you not quit your hiding-place? Will you not hasten to do so? You who are quiet and retiring, when you hear the name of Jesus blasphemed, as it is in these evil days, will you not stand up for him? When you hear his Diety denied, when his headship in the church is given to another, when his very person is by lewd fellows of the baser sort set up as the target of their criticism, will you not speak up for him? Will you not be shocked by such evil conduct into an open avowal? His cause is that of truth and righteousness, and mercy and hope for the sons of men, therefore he must not be abused while you sit by in silence. Had others favored him you might, perhaps, have been somewhat excused for holding back; but you cannot keep back without grievous sin now that so many deride him. Jesus is worthy of all honor, and yet they heap scorn upon him: will you not defend him? He is your Saviour and Lord; oh, be not slow to own that you are his. The cross laid bare the heart of Joseph; he loathed the wickedness which slew the Holy and the Just, and therefore he girded himself to become the guardian of his sacred body.

But, next, it may have been in part *the wonderful patience of the Master's death* which made Joseph feel he could not hide any longer. Did he hear him say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"? Did he mark him when those blessed lips said, "I thirst"? Do you think he observed the ribaldry and scorn which surrounded the dying Lord? and did he feel that the stones would cry out if he did not show kindness to his best friend? Since Jesus spake not for himself, but was dumb as a sheep before her shearers, Joseph is bound to open his mouth for him. If Jesus answered not, but only breathed out prayers for his

murderers, the honorable counsellor must acknowledge him. The sun has owned him, and veiled his face in sackcloth! The earth has owned him, and trembled to her very heart at his sufferings! Death has owned him, and yielded up the bodies which the sepulchre had hitherto detained! The temple has owned him, and in its horror has rent its veil, like a woman that is utterly broken in heart by the horrors she has seen! Therefore Joseph must own him, he cannot resist the impulse. Oh, brethren, if you have been backward, let some such motive lead you unto the van of the host.

Then there were all *the wonders of that death* which he saw, and to which I have already alluded. They sufficed to convince the centurion that this was a righteous man. They convinced others that he was the Son of God; and he who was already a disciple of Christ must have been greatly confirmed in that conviction by what he saw around the cross. The time was come when he must boldly act as Christ's disciple. Have there been no wonders of conversion around you? no answers to prayer? no providential deliverances? Should not these lead the secret ones to declare themselves?

I do not suppose he fully understood *the design of our Lord's death*; he had some knowledge of it, but not such a knowledge as we have now that the Spirit of God has appeared in all his fulness, and taught us the meaning of the cross. Oh, listen, sirs, ye that are not upon his side openly, ye that have never worn his livery, nor manifestly entered on his service. He died for you! Those wounds were all for you; that bloody sweat, of which you still may see the marks upon the countenance of the Crucified, was all for you. For you the thirst and fever, for you the bowing of the head, and the giving up of the ghost; and can you be ashamed to own him?

Will you not endure rebuke and scorn for his dear sake who bore all this for you? Now speak from your soul and say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." If you cannot say that, you cannot be happy; but if you can, then what follows? Must you not love him, and give yourself for him? The cross is a wondrous magnet, drawing to Jesus every man of the true metal. It is as a banner lifted on high, to which all who are loyal must rally. This fiery cross, carried through all lands, will rouse the valiant and speed them to the field. Can you see your Lord suffering to the death for you, and then turn your backs? I pray you may no longer hesitate, but may at once cry, "Set down my name among his followers; for I will fight it out even to the end, till I hear him say—

> "'Come in, come in;
> Eternal glory thou shalt win.'"

Thus much by way of instruction taken from the life of Joseph of Arimathæa. If the cross does not bring a man out, what will? If the spectacle of dying love does not quicken us into courageous affection for him, what can?

III. So I have to mention in the third place, something for OUR AROUSING. Perhaps you are saying in your heart that the season in which Joseph lived was one which imperatively demanded that he should leave his hiding-place and should go in to Pilate, but that you are under no such constraint. Hearken, friends; many people are not true to their occasions, whatever they may be; they do not consider that they have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. The Lord Jesus is not hanging on a cross to-day needing to be buried; but other stern necessities exist, and call for your exertions.

This hour's necessities imperiously demand that every man who is right at heart should acknowledge his Lord and do him service. Every man that loves Christ should at this hour prove it by his actions. A buoy off the Mumbles in South Wales bears a bell which is meant to warn mariners of a dangerous rock. This bell is quiet enough in ordinary weather; but when the winds are out, and the great waves rush in towards the shore, its solemn tones are heard for miles around as it swings to and fro in the hands of the sea. I believe there are true men who are silent when everything is calm, who will be forced to speak when the wild winds are out. Permit me to assure you that a storm is raging now, and it is growing worse and worse. If I rightly read the signs of the times, it is meet that every bell should ring out its warning note lest souls be lost upon the rocks of error. You that have fallen behind because the fighting did not seem to require you, must quit your positions of ease. I summon you in the Master's name to the war. The Lord hath need of you. If you come not to his help against the mighty a curse will light upon you. Ye must either be written across the back as *craven cowards*, or else you will to-day solemnly espouse the cause of Jesus. Shall I tell you why?

I will tell you why Joseph was wanted, and that was, just because *Christ's enemies had at last gone too far.* When they hunted him about and took up stones to stone him they went a very long way; when they said he had a devil and was mad, they went much too far; when they asserted that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that was a piece of blasphemy; but now, now they have overstepped the line most fatally; they have actually taken the King of Israel and nailed him up to a cross, and he is dead; and

therefore Joseph cannot stand it any longer. He quits their company and joins himself to the Lord Jesus. See how far men are going in these days. In the outside world we have infidelity of so gross, so brutish a character, that it is unworthy of the civilization, much less of the Christianity of our age. Now, ye fearful ones, come out, and refuse to be numbered with the unbelieving world. Besides, in the outward Christian church we see men who, having already taken away every doctrine that we hold dear, are now assailing the inspiration of God's own word. They tell us plainly that they do not believe what the Scriptures say further than they choose to do. The Bible to them is a fine book, but rather out of date. Now, if you can be quiet, I cannot. The citadel of Christendom is now attacked. Let no brave man shrink from its defence. If you can hold your tongues, and see the faith rent to pieces, I cannot. Why, it is enough to make every man gird on his weapon and rush to the fight. Years ago, when they talked of the French invading England, an old lady grew very indignant, and threatened deadly resistance. When she was asked what the women of England could do, she said they would rise to a man. I have no doubt whatever that they would do their best in any such emergency. Every iron in the fire-place, whether it be poker or shovel, would be grasped to defend our hearths and homes; and just so now, when error knows no bounds, we must stand up for the defence of the truth. Since they push error to extremes, it becomes us to hold by every particle of the faith. I will not, for my own part, give up a corner of my creed for any man. Even if we might have been prepared to modify expressions had the age been different, we are not in that mood now. A generation of vipers shall have a naked file to bite at. We

will modify nothing. If truth bears a stern aspect we will not veil it. If there be an offence in the cross we will not conceal it. This shall be my answer to those who would have us attune ourselves to the spirit of the age,—I know no Spirit but one, and he is unchanging in every age. Your extravagance of doubt shall have no influence over us except to make us bind the gospel more closely to our hearts. If we gave you an inch you would take a mile, and so no inch shall be given you. Our resolve is to live for the Book as we read it, for the gospel as we rest in it, for the Lord as he made atonement, for the kingdom as it ruleth over all. I beg every trembling Christian to take heart, put on his Lord's livery, and advance to the fray. Come out now, if you never did before! Come out, if there is any manliness in you, in these days of blasphemy and rebuke.

> "Ye that are men now serve him,
> Against unnumber'd foes;
> Your courage rise with danger,
> And strength to strength oppose."

When Joseph of Arimathæa revealed himself as our Lord's disciple, *our Lord's friends had mostly fled*—we might almost say they had all departed. Then Joseph said, "I will go in and beg for the body." When everybody else runs away, then the timid man grows brave; and often have I noticed it, that when there has been a wide desertion from the faith, then the feeble have become strong. Those poor souls who had said, "We hardly know whether we are the people of God at all, we are so unworthy," have crept out of their dens and have waxed valiant in fight, putting to flight the armies of the aliens. A sister was asked to tell her experience before the church, and she could not do it; but as she

went away she turned round and said, "I cannot speak for Christ, but I could die for him." "Come back," said the minister, "you are welcome here!" They do gloriously, those hidden ones, in days whereof we are apt to fear that no witness for the truth will remain alive. Oh, that you who live where religion is declining may be all the more resolved to serve the Lord Jesus faithfully!

And then, you know, in Joseph's time *the people that were true to the Lord Jesus were such a feeble company.* Those that were not absolutely poor—the women that could minister to him of their substance—were nevertheless unable to go in unto Pilate and beg for the Lord's body. He would not have received them, and if he would they were too timid to have sought an interview; but Joseph is rich, and a counsellor, and therefore he seemed to say, "These dear good women need a friend; they cannot get that precious body down from the cross alone. I will go to the Roman governor. Together with Nicodemus, I will provide the linen and the spices, and the women shall help us take Jesus down from the tree and lay him in my new tomb, and swathe his limbs in linen and spices, so as to embalm him honorably." Some of you live in country towns where those who are faithful to God are very poor, and have not much ability among them. If anything should move you to be the more decided, it should be that fact. It is a brave thing to help a feeble company; any common people will follow at the heels of success, but the true man is not ashamed of a despised cause when it is the cause of truth. You who have talent and substance should say, "I will go and help them now. I cannot leave the Master's cause to this feeble folk. I know they do their best, and as that is little, I will join

them and lay myself out to aid them for my great Master's sake."

Can you not see my drift? My only desire this morning is to induce any of you who have for a moment faltered to "stand up, stand up for Jesus," and everywhere, in every place as wisdom may suggest, avow his dear and sacred name. Perhaps you are flowers that cannot bloom till the light is darkened, like the night-blooming cereus or the evening primrose. Now is your hour. The evening is already come; bloom, my dear friends, and fill the air with the delightful fragrance of your love. When other flowers are closed, take care to open to the dew. In these dark hours shine out, ye stars! The sun has gone, else might ye lie hid; but now let us see you! Joseph and Nicodemus had never been seen in the daylight when Jesus was alive; but when the sun was set through his death, then their radiance beamed at its full. Oh, my hesitating brother, now is your time and your hour: boldly avail yourself of it, for our great Master's sake!

IV. Lastly, there is something in this subject for OUR GUIDANCE. Somebody says, "Well, what do you mean by my coming out? I can see what Joseph did: what am I to do? I do not live at Arimathæa, and there is no Pilate in these days."

Joseph in owning his Lord *put himself under personal risk.* A Christian slave, whose master was executed for being a Christian, went to the judge, and begged the body of his master that he might bury it. The judge replied, "Wherefore do you wish for your master's body?" "Because he was a Christian, and I am one." Upon this confession he was himself condemned to die. It might have been so with Pilate; for the Jewish rulers must have hated Joseph and longed for his death. He had

been backward a long time, but now he put his life in his hand, and went in boldly to Pilate. We read, "He craved the body of Jesus"; but, as a commentator well says, he was not a craven, though he craved the body. He simply asked for it, begged for it, implored to have it, and the procurator yielded to his wish. Now, do you think that if it were needful for you to jeopardize your best earthly interests for Christ, you could do it? Could you lose your character for culture and courage by avowing the old faith in these apostate days. Can you leave all for Jesus? Should it rend the fondest connection, should it break up the brightest prospects, could you take up the cross and follow your Lord? It is due to him who died for you that you should count the cost, and reckon it little enough for his dear sake if you may but do him honor.

Remember, again, that this good man, Joseph of Arimathæa, when he took the body of Jesus, brought upon himself *ceremonial pollution.* It may seem little enough to you, but to a Jew it was a great deal, especially during the Passover week. He handled that blessed body, and defiled himself in the judgment of the Jews. But, oh, I warrant you he did not think it any defilement to touch the blessed person of his Lord, even when the life was gone out of that matchless frame. Nor was it any pollution. It was an honor to touch that holy thing, that body prepared of God. Yet they will say to you, if you come out for Christ and unite with his people, that you lower yourself. They will point at you, give you some opprobrious name, and charge you with fanaticism. Take upon yourself this blessed shame, and say, as David did, "I will be yet more vile." Dishonor for Christ is honor, and shame for him is the very top of all glory. You will not stand back, I trust, but you will

come forward and avow your faith, though you thus become as the offscouring of all things.

And then, this man having risked his life, and given up his honor, was content to be *at great cost for the burial of Christ.* He went and bought the fine linen; and that rock-hewn sepulchre which it was the ambition of every Israelite to possess, he cheerfully resigned, that the Lord might lie there. Now, whenever you do own Christ, own him practically. Do not keep back your purse from him, or think that you are to say, "I am his," and do nothing for him. I was reading the story of a good old deacon in Maine, in America, who came in to a meeting after there had been a missionary collection. The minister there and then asked "our good brother Sewell" to pray. Sewell did not pray, but thrust his hand in his pocket and stood fumbling about. "Bring the box," he said; and when the box came, and he had put his money into it, the minister said, "Brother Sewell, I did not ask you to give anything, I only wished you to pray." "Oh," said he, "I could not pray till I had first given something." He felt obliged first to do something for the great mission work, and having done that he could pray for it. Oh, that all Christ's people felt the justice of that course of conduct! Is it not most natural and proper? Joseph could not, when the Saviour wanted burying, have been true to him without burying him. And now that the Saviour does not want burying, but wants in all his living power to be preached among the sons of men, if we love him we must do all that lieth in us to spread the knowledge of his name. Come out then, come out then, ye that are hidden among the stuff! Some of you strangers from the country, who have lived in the village, and attended the services, but never joined the church, do not let another Sunday dawn till you

have sent in your name to be classed with the people of God. And any of you that have come often to the Tabernacle, and say that nobody has spoken to you, just you speak to somebody and own what the Lord has done for you. Joseph of Arimathæa, where are you? Come forward, man! Come forth; your time has come! Come forth *now!* If you have followed Christ secretly, throw secrecy to the winds! Henceforth be bravest of the brave, among the body-guard of Christ, who follow him whithersoever he goeth. Have no fear nor thought of fear, but count it all joy if you fall into manifold trials for his name's sake, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

VII.

THE GLORY IN THE REAR.

August 3, 1884.

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."—EXODUS xiv. 19, 20.

"The glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward."—ISAIAH lviii. 8.

"For the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward."—ISAIAH lii. 12.

WHEN the Israelites left the place of their bondage and came to the edge of the wilderness, a visible token of the Lord's presence and leadership was granted to them. They saw high in the air a pillar, which by day might be compared to rising smoke, but at night became a flame of fire. Such displays on a small scale were usual in the march of armies, but this was of supernatural origin. Where it moved the people were to follow; it was to be their companion, that they might not be alone: their conductor, that they might not go astray. We have become familiar, by accounts of our own soldiery in Egypt, with the extreme danger of the oriental sun when men are marching over the fiery sand: this cloud would act as a vast umbrella tent, covering the whole of the great congregation, so that they could march without being faint with the heat. By night their canvas city was lighted up by this grand illumination. They could march as well by night as by

day, for we are told at the close of the previous chapter that by night the Lord went before them "in a pillar of fire, to give them light; *to go by day and night.*" Might they not have said, "The Lord God is a sun and shield"? Did they not realize the fulfilment of the promise not yet spoken in words, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night"? This sacred symbol of the divine presence must have been a very great solace to them in those early days, when their pilgrim life was novel to them, and their newly-found liberty was darkened by a terrible fear of recapture.

The particular sign which the Lord vouchsafed them was very practical; it was not only *glorious,* but *useful;* it served them both for shade and light, and was both their guide and guard. It was exceedingly *conspicuous,* so that they could all see it. Any man of the millions who came out of Egypt could stand at his tent door and see this flaming signal high in heaven, floating over all as the banner and oriflamme of the Great King. It appears to have been *continual;* an abiding token, and not an intermittent brightness. Even thus has Moses written:—"He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."

Beloved friends, God is always with those who are with him. If we trust him, he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is a special and familiar presence of God with those who walk uprightly, both in the night of their sorrow, and in the day of their joy. Yet we do not always in the same way perceive that presence so as to enjoy it. God never leaves us, but we sometimes think he has done so. The sun shines on, but we do not always bask in its beams; we sometimes mourn an absent God—it is the bitterest of

all our mourning. As he is the sum total of our joy, so his departure is the essence of our misery. If God do not smile upon us, who can cheer us? If he be not with us, then the strong helpers fail, and the mighty men are put to rout. It is concerning the presence of God that I am going to speak this morning. You and I know how joyous it is. May we never be made to know its infinite value experimentally by the loss of it. If we see no cloud or flame, yet may we know that God is with us, and his power is around us. In that sense we will pray,

> "Cover us with thy cloudy shrine,
> And in thy fiery column shine."

Or in more familiar words we will sing,

> "Let the fiery cloudy pillar
> Lead me all my journey through."

I. In considering the subject of the Lord's abiding with his people, I shall first call attention to THE DIVINE PRESENCE MYSTERIOUSLY REMOVED. According to our text, "The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed." The chosen of the Lord may lose the manifested presence of God; and, indeed, often they may miss it in the particular form in which they have been accustomed to enjoy it.

The symbol of God's presence removed *from where it had usually been.* From the day when they entered upon the desert, they had seen the fiery, cloudy pillar well to the front; but now suddenly it wheeled about, and left the van comparatively dim, because the glory had departed. Those who looked forward saw it no more. So has it been with us at times: we have walked day after day in the light of God's countenance, we have enjoyed

sweet fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord, and on a sudden we have missed his glorious manifestation. Like the spouse, we cried, "I sought him, but I found him not." Aforetime everything had seemed bright, and we expected to go from strength to strength, from victory to victory, till we came unto the mount of God, to dwell forever in his rest; but now before us on a sudden things look dark; we do not feel so sure of heaven as we were, nor so certain of perpetual growth and progress. The prospect is darkened, the clouds return after the rain, and our soul out of the darkness cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

Moreover, they missed the light *from where they hoped it would always be.* They had been given to understand, I do not doubt, that the Lord would be always with them; and yet now, as they looked forward, the bright light was gone from its place of leadership. They looked for it as their guide, and, behold, that guidance was gone! The pillar might be behind them, but it was not before them; they could see nothing ahead to lead them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which the Lord had promised them. Sometimes you also may imagine that God's promise is failing you; even the word of God which you had laid hold upon may appear to you to be contradicted by your circumstances. Then your heart sinks to the depths, for "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" If ever the word of God becomes a subject of doubt, where can any certainty remain? Where any hope for the future? We have said, "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death": but what if he refuse to guide us? Then are we in an evil case. Can it be so? "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

The pillar of fire also removed *from where it seemed more than ever to be needed.* Now they were in a cleft stick; how could they possibly escape? Pharaoh was behind them, with all the horsemen of Egypt. They could hear the noise of the chariots, and the neighing of the horses, and the shouts of the armies, eager for the prey. Before them rolled the Red Sea in its might. How could there be a way in the mighty waters? Now, if ever in their lives, they must have looked anxiously for the symbol of the Divine presence. What could they do if Jehovah did not lead their van? Yet the token of his presence was not there. Even thus is it with you, dear friend, who once walked in the light of God's countenance: you perhaps have fallen into temporal trouble, and at the same moment the heavenly light has departed from your soul. Now, it is bad to be in the dark on the king's highway; but it is worse to be in the dark when you are out on the open common, and do not know your road. It is well to have a guide when the road is easy; but you must have one when you are coming upon precipitous and dangerous places. Is it so with any child of God here, that he sees no light to shine before him, no star to guide him on his road? On the contrary, does his future become more and more clouded? Is the track quite gone? Does the sea seem shut in with an iron-bound coast without a harbor? Does he

> "See every day new straits attend,
> And wonder where the scene will end?"

Then let him trust; but he will need all the faith of which he can be master. Oh, my Lord, if ever thou dost leave me, forsake me not in the day of trouble. Yet what have I said? It is a day of trouble when thou art gone, whatever my condition may be. Yet, brethren, our Lord

said, "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter." Pray that if you must for a while bewail the Lord's absence from you, it may not be in a time of dire and dark necessity.

Thus it did seem a mysterious thing that the Covenant Angel should no longer direct the marchings of the host of God, and I dare say that some of them began to account for it *by a reason which their fears would suggest.* Naturally, there was only one way of accounting for this removal of the guide, and that way was a wrong one, but one to which the Lord's people often refer their trials. I should not wonder that, if they had been asked why the blazing pillar was no longer in the van, they would have replied, "Because of our murmurings against the Lord and his servant Moses. God will not go before us because of our sins." Now, it is true, and does happen, that the Lord often hides his face behind the clouds of dust that his own children make by their sins; but this is not always the case. When the consolations of God are small with you, you may generally conclude that there is some secret sin with you; and then it is your duty to cry, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." But in this case God was not punishing them for their sins, as he did on after occasions. He seems to have been very patient with their early murmurings, because they were such feeble folk, so unused to pilgrimage, and so unfit for anything heroic. Every trial was severe to the raw, undisciplined spirits of the tribes, and therefore the Lord winked at their follies. There was not a touch of the rod about this withdrawing of his presence from the van, not even a trace of anger; it was all done in loving-kindness and tender mercy, and no sort of chastisement was intended by it. So, dear child of God, you must not always conclude that trouble is

sent because of wrath, and that the loss of conscious joy is necessarily a punishment for sin. Such thoughts will be a case of knives cutting your heart in pieces. Do not make for yourself a needless pain. All trouble is not chastisement; it may be a way of love for your enriching and ennobling. Upon the black horse of trouble the Lord sends his messengers of love. It is a good thing for us to be afflicted; for thus we learn patience, and attain to assurance. Shall the champion who is bidden to go to the front of the battle think that he is punished thereby? No, verily, my brethren: whom the Lord loveth he sets in the heat of the conflict, that they may earn the rarest honors. Great suffering and heavy labors are often the rewards of faithfulness. Know ye not how the poet puts it,—

> "If I find him, if I follow,
> What his guerdon here?
> 'Many a labor, many a sorrow,
> Many a tear'"?

Darkness of soul is not always the fruit of divine anger, though it is often so. Sometimes there is no trace of wrath in it: it is sent for a test of faith, for the excitement of desire, and for the increase of our sympathy with others who walk in darkness. When the cloud of the divine glory is no longer seen in front, it has gone behind, because it is more wanted there, and it is no loss after all, as we shall have to show. When the Lord hides his face for a moment, it is to make us value his face the more, to quicken our diligence in following after him, to try our faith, and to test our graces. There are a thousand precious uses in this adversity. Yet it is a mysterious thing when the light of the future fades, and we seem to be without a guide.

II. Now, secondly, all this while THE DIVINE PRESENCE WAS GRACIOUSLY NEAR. The angel of the Lord had removed,

but it is added, he "removed and *went behind them*," and he was just as close to them when he was in the rear, as when he led the van. He might not seem to be their guide, but he had all the more evidently become their guard. He might not for the moment be their Sun before, but then he had become their Shield behind. "The glory of the Lord was their rearward." The Lord may be very close to thee, dear child, when thou canst not see him, perhaps closer than ever he was when thou couldst see him. The presence of God is not to be measured by thy realization of it. When thou canst not tell that he is with thee at all, and thou art sighing and crying after him, those very sighs and cries after him are the holy fruit of his secret presence. It may be, the day shall come when thou shalt think that he was more near thee when thine eyes were filled with weeping after him, than when thou didst take thine ease, and speak confidently. Much of the creature, much of human excitement will mix with our most spiritual joy; our groanings and our sorrows, when we are pining after the Lord, are often more purely spiritual than our own delights, and therefore they are all the surer proofs of the work of the Lord in our souls. Oh, soul, the Lord may be very near thee, and yet he may be behind thee, so that thine outlook for the future may not be filled with the vision of his glory.

Note in the text that it is said the pillar went, and "*stood behind them.*" I like that, for it is a settled, permanent matter. The Lord had removed, but he was not removing still. He would stay as long as was needful where he then was. That glorious angel, shrouded in the clouds, stood with his drawn sword in the rear of Israel, saying to Pharaoh, "Thou darest not come further; thou canst not break in upon my chosen." He lifted up his vast shield of darkness, and held it up before the tyrant

king, so that he could not strike, nay, could not see. All that night his horses champed their bits, but could not pursue the flying host. "They were as still as a stone till thy people passed over, O Lord, till thy people passed over whom thou hadst purchased." It is glorious to think that the Lord stood there, and the furious enemy was compelled to halt. Even thus the Lord remaineth with the dear child of God. Thou canst not see anything before thee to make thee glad, but the living God stands behind thee to ward off the adversary. He cannot forsake thee. He saith to thee out of the pillar of cloud, "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." He standeth fast as thy rock, steadfast as thy safeguard, sleepless as thy watcher, valiant as thy champion.

> "God is near thee, therefore cheer thee,
> Sad mind!
> He'll defend thee, all around thee,
> And behind."

What is more, these people had God so near that *they could see him if they did but look back.* Earnestly I desire you to think of this. If you cannot see the Lord bright before you, and you are very dull and heavy, then I pray you look back and see how the Lord has helped you hitherto. Sit not down with your eyes shut, but look back! Steadily observe the past! What see you there? Loving kindness and tender mercy, and nothing else. As I look back upon my own past life—and I think I am not one by myself—I cannot discover, even with the quick eye of selfishness, anything of which I can complain of my God. "Truly God is good to Israel." "His mercy endureth for ever." Not one good thing hath failed: he has never left me, nor forsaken me. I have

received blessings through my joys, and even greater blessings through my sorrows. The Lord's way has been all goodness, undiluted goodness, all the while. I look back, and see the light of his presence shining like the sun at noon; it is as a morning without clouds; I am overwhelmed with the boundless bounty of my God. I am unable to conceive of anything more kind than the heart of God towards his unworthy child. Well, then, God is not far away; if we look backward he is there. He has been mindful of us, he will bless us. He gave us mercies yesterday; and he is the same to-day and for ever. The blessings of last night we have not forgotten; the blessings of this morning, are they not still with us? The fountain will not fail; it has flowed too long for us to raise the question. If there be no light breaking in the east, behold, it is lighting up the western sky. The Lord is evidently still behind us, and it is enough; for we can sing, "The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." "He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

A thoughtful person would conclude the Lord to *be all the more evidently near because of the change of his position.* When a symbol of mercy comes to be usual and fixed, we may be tempted to think that it remains as a matter of routine. If the rainbow were always visible it might not be so assuring a token of the covenant. Hence the Lord often changes his hand, and blesses his people in another way, to let them see that he is thinking of them. If he always did the same by us, every day and every night, we should get to attribute his dealings to some fixed law operating apart from God, just as our modern philosophers dethrone the Lord to set up the calves of nature. But now, when our God is sometimes before us, and sometimes behind us, and makes those apparent changes because

of deep and urgent reasons, we are compelled to feel that we are the objects of his constant solicitude. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." He deals with us in all wisdom and prudence. His modes change, but the changes are all from the same motive, and with the same reason, all to make us sick of self and fond of him. Blessed be his name, the change of his operations makes us feel the unchangeableness of his design; and the different ways in which he visits us only makes us value each visit the more.

III. Thirdly, let us see THE DIVINE PRESENCE WISELY REVEALED. That the symbol of God's presence should be withdrawn from the front and become visible behind, was a wise thing.

Observe, there was no fiery pillar of cloud before them, and that was wise; *for the going down into the Red Sea was intended to be an act of lofty faith.* The more of the visible, the less is faith visible. The more you have of conscious enjoyment, the less room there is for simple trust. Faith performs her greatest feats in the darkest places. These Israelites were to do what after all was a grandly glorious thing for them to do,—to march right down into the heart of the sea. What people ever did this before? Modern haters of miracle may say that they passed over the sands at an unusual tide, and that an extraordinarily strong wind drove back the water and left a passage; but that is not the notion of the Holy Spirit. He says by his servant Moses, "The floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." It is also written, "But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." The tribes went down into the dread valley which remained when the waters dried up, and

they crossed over between two frowning walls of water. You and I would have needed great faith to have gone down into such an abyss as that; but they descended without fear. Moses lifting up his rod and the waters rolling apart to make them a passage-way, with no fiery cloudy pillar in front of them, they calmly marched into the heart of the sea. That was a grand act of faith. This would not have been so clearly of faith had the way been made easier by miracle and token. I know some of you who are Christian people want to be always coddled and cuddled, like weakly babies. You pine for love-visits and delights, and promises sealed home to your heart. You would live on sweetmeats and be wheeled in a spiritual perambulator all the way to heaven; but your heavenly Father is not going to do anything of the sort. He will be with you, but he will try your manhood, and so develop it. I have seen children cosseted into the grave by their fond mother; and I suppose that a great many more will follow in the same way; but God never spoils his children. He educates them for nobler ends. He takes visible guides away from them that they may exercise faith in him. Why, Job would have been nobody if he had not lost everything. Who would have heard of the patriarch of Uz? What glory would he have brought to God with his camels and his oxen and his children? These were all taken away, and then Job became famous. See how he sits on the dunghill and is much more noteworthy there than Solomon in all his glory. Where the word of king Solomon was there was power, but nothing to equal the power of Job's word when he blessed the God who taketh away. Solomon spake many proverbs, and wrote many songs; but none of them attained unto the glory of that saying,—"Though he slay me, yet will I

trust in him." Here was a triumph of faith! Beloved, you and I lose the enjoyments of religion and the comforts of hope in order that we may walk by faith and not by sight, and may the more greatly glorify God.

Moreover, let us mark that the cloudy pillar was taken away from the front because *the Lord meant them simply to accept his word as their best guidance.* The Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." That word was sufficient guide. Suppose they had said, "Lord, we will go forward if the fiery pillar leads us forward, but not else." What then? Why, they would have been rebels. We are to obey God's word as God's word. I heard a brother say some time ago that he should be baptized when it was laid home to him. I thought of what a father would say to his boy if he said, "Father, I shall obey you if it is laid home to me." In all probability the child would have it laid home to him more feelingly than he desired. There are some disobedient children in the Lord's family who, if they do not mind, will have scriptures laid home to them in a way they do not quite reckon upon. What have you and I to guide us but the word of the Lord? "Well," says one, "I guide myself by outward providences." Do you? You will get into a terrible maze one of these days. Jonah wanted to flee from the presence of the Lord, and therefore he went down to the seaside, and lo, he found a ship going to Tarshish. Might he not have said, "I must be in the way of duty in going to Tarshish, for no sooner did I go down to the wharf than I found a ship starting immediately, and a cabin vacant for a passenger. I paid my fare, and walked on board at once. I had not to go off to the shipping-agent's, and wait for the next liner, but all was prepared for me. Was not that a providence!" Yes,

but if you get following providence, and turning aside from the word, you may soon find yourself in the sea, and no whale prepared for you. Our way is clearly set before us in the word of God, and that most sure word of testimony should be followed. I have known a brother wanting to go abroad to preach the gospel to the heathen, but a great many difficulties have been thrown in his way, and therefore he has said, "I can see that I am not called to go." Why not? Is no man called unless his way is easy? I should think myself all the more called to a service if I found obstacles in my way. The course of true service never did run smooth. I should say, "The devil is trying to hinder me, but I will do it in spite of all the devils in hell." Will you always be wanting to have your bread buttered for you on both sides? Must your road be gravelled, and smoothed with a garden roller? Are you a carpet knight, for whom there is to be no fighting? You are not worthy to be a soldier of Jesus Christ at all if you look for ease. Go home! I dare say, after all, it is the best thing you can do. True believers expect difficulties. It is ours to do what we are bidden to do, not to act according to fancied indications of providence. When the Lord said "Forward!" forward Israel must go, without a fiery cloudy pillar to cheer the way. Has not the Lord spoken? Who shall ask for plainer guidance?

Moreover, God was teaching them another lesson, namely, that *he may be near his people when he does not give them the usual tokens of his presence.* Who shall say that God was not in the van of Israel when they went down into the sea? They could not see the ensign of his presence, but he could see their obedience to his bidding. How else did the sea in fright draw back?

Was it not because the Lord rebuked the sea? The strong east wind did not of itself divide the sea; for a wind naturally strong enough for that would have blown all the people into the air. The wind was used of God to move the waters, but its chief object was to dry up the damp from the floor of the sea, and to make marching the more easy for the vast host of Israel. Truly the Lord was there, triumphing gloriously. No cloudy pillar was seen across the waters as Israel looked forward to the shore; but yet the Lord was there majestically; and you may have but little comfort of the Lord's presence at this time, and yet God may be with you wondrously. Do not so much set your heart upon comfort, but rejoice in the fact which gladdened Hagar in the wilderness: "Thou God seest me." It does not matter to the fire whether the logs are cast upon it from the front, or the oil poured upon it secretly from behind the wall, so long as it finds its fuel. To you the daily supply of grace is more important than the supply of comfort, and this shall never fail you so long as you live.

Let me whisper to you one word more. After all, *the host of Israel did not require any guide in front when they came to the sea.* "How is that?" say you. Why, beloved, there were no two ways to choose from: they could not miss the way, for they must needs march through the sea. No room for wandering remained: their road was walled up, and they could not miss it. So when men come into deep trouble, and cannot get out of it, they scarcely need a guide; for their own plain path is submission and patience. Tried child of God, you have to bear your trouble, and when that is quite clear your way is no longer doubtful. Cast all your care on him who careth for you, and in patience possess your soul. "Oh, but I thought I was going to find a way of escape

made for me." Listen! "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, *that ye may be able to bear it.*" You have to bear it, you see. Your great want for this present is faith in God, who has said—"I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea." Thus, you see, the light for guidance was not needed just then.

What they did want was the pillar of cloud behind them, and that is where they had it. What was that cloud behind them for? Well, it was there for several reasons: the first was to shut out the sight of their enemies from them. We read that Israel lifted up their eyes and saw the Egyptians, and then they began to tremble, and cry out: and so God drew the blinds down that his poor children could not see their frightful taskmasters. It is a great mercy when God does not let us see everything. What the eye does not see, perhaps the heart will not rue. May I ask you just to try and use your eyes a little now? There are your sins; will you look back on them for a minute? Look steadily. They are quite as dreadful as the Egyptian horsemen and chariots. I have looked intently, and I cannot see a sin remaining. "What, have you lived such a life that you have never sinned?" Ah, no, beloved, I have to mourn over many offences; but I cannot see one of them now, for my sin is covered. I believe this text, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If I am cleansed, why should I see spots, or speak as if I did? The Lord stands between his people and their sins. Jesus, who veiled his glory in the cloud of our humanity, interposes between us and our transgressions. Is it not written, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought

for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve"? If God declares that our sins cannot be found, then I am sure we need not look for them; and if he says that Christ has made an end of sin, then there is an end of it. The Egyptians shall not come near us all the night of this life; and when the morning breaketh, we shall see them dead upon the shore. Then shall we sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, and our transgressions and iniquities hath he cast into the depths of the sea.

"Ah," saith one, "I know that my sins are forgiven, but I am troubled about my circumstances." Will you now look back with all your eyes? How about the circumstances you have passed through? Do you see anything wrong about them now? Oh, no, say you, they were all right. As you look back you can only see the glory of God: the Lord hath led you by a right way. Very well: learn to look at your circumstances through the light God hath set between Israel and the Egyptians. Who is he that can harm us? What is there to distress us? See your circumstances through the medium of the love of Jesus, and you perceive all things working for your good. Hitherto the Lord hath been our shield and our exceeding great reward. We see now no evil occurrent; he hath turned for us the curse into a blessing. The Lord has caused us to be far from fear, and has put terror far away.

The cloudy pillar went behind for another reason, namely, *that the Egyptians might not see them.* Their enemies were made to stumble, and were compelled to come to a dead stand. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them." Why does he halt? Why does the lion

pause when about to spring? He is blindfolded. He shivers in the dense blackness, bethinking him of that former day when all the land of Mizraim quailed beneath a darkness that might be felt. Be calm, O child of God; for the Covenant Angel is dealing with your adversaries, and his time is generally the night. You will hear by-and-by of what he has done. Meanwhile, remember what he did to Pharaoh and Sennacherib. The Lord may not be before you, shedding delight upon your face, but he is behind you, holding back the foe. He looks forth from the cloud and discomforts your foes. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Wherefore, stand still, and see the salvation of God!

IV. Now, beloved, I must draw towards a conclusion by observing that THE DIVINE PRESENCE WILL ONE DAY BE MORE GLORIOUSLY REVEALED. I have been speaking about the Lord being the rearward of his people, and so explaining my second text: but I must now refer you to my last text, in the fifty-second of Isaiah—"The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward." This is the condition into which the Lord brings his people when they depart from Babylon, and are no more conformed to this present evil world. I trust he has brought many of us into this all-surrounding light at this good hour. The Lord is behind us, we know: our sins and iniquities are covered, our past mistakes are all erased, we are accepted in the Beloved. But we have not to look forward and say, "The angel of God has removed." Oh, no; we can see the bright light before us still. Our ways are ordered of the Lord, and none of our steps shall slide. We glory in tribulations also, believing that we shall glorify God in them. We look

forward to the time of old age, believing that to hoar hairs he is the same, and that in our days of decline he will carry us. We look forward to the advent of our Lord with delight; or, if that may not be in our day, we look to falling asleep upon the bosom of our Saviour. Before us we see the resurrection morning and all its splendor: we anticipate the risen body, that glorified fabric in which our pure and perfect spirits shall dwell for ever: we hear the voice of harpers harping with their harps, saluting the reign of Christ and the glorification of his people with him. Below there is nothing before us now but that which is inexpressibly delightful; the day has long dawned with us, whose morning clouds have passed away; a day which grows warmer and brighter, and is nearing to the perfect day. A few more months, a few more years, and we shall be in the land of the unclouded sky. What will it be to be there! What will it be to be there for ever!

> "Far from a world of grief and sin,
> With God eternally shut in."

How willingly would I fly away and be at rest. I feel my wings; they are not strong enough, as yet, to bear my soul away; but they will be. God is making his children ready to depart, and he will only have to beckon them, and they will cry, "Here am I," and then they shall be with him for ever. Yes, the glory of the Lord is above us and beneath us, on the right hand and on the left, without us and within us. We depart not from it, though it is behind us: we are going ever into the glorious light, for it is before us, too. The Lord shall be a wall of fire around about us, and the glory in the midst. If you have come there, dear brother, stop there. If you have entered there, dear sister, never quit that

charmed circle, but abide in full communion with the Lord your God.

V. But now I have a sorrowful word to say, and with that I have done. THIS DIVINE PRESENCE HAS A TWOFOLD ASPECT: that same glory which lit up the canvas city, and made it bright as the day, darkened all the camps of Egypt. They could see nothing, for the dark side of *God* was turned to them. I am afraid it is so with some of you.

Oh, dear friends, is it not a dreadful thing that to some men the most terrible thing in the world would be God? If you could get away from God, how happy, how merry, how jolly you would be! You want to depart from him; you are departing from him. One of these days Jesus will tell you to depart. "Keep on as you were," says he, "you were always departing from God; keep on departing. Depart from me, ye cursed!" That will be the consummation of your life. To some of us the thought of God is joy, but to the ungodly nothing would be such good news as to hear that there was no God; indeed, they find a dreadful comfort in endeavoring to be sceptical and unbelieving. God has a dark side to sinners; his justice and his righteousness, which are the comfort of his people, are the despair of the wicked.

The word of God has a dark side to sinners. I will tell you what they say: they say, "We do not understand this Book, it is so full of mystery. We find it full of dark sayings, and hard things, and things difficult to be believed. It is all knots and snarls." Just so; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. Let me call up the smallest babe in grace, and say, "Dear child, is that what the Bible is to you?" "Oh, no," he says, "it is my joy and my delight. I may not understand it all, but

I love it all, and I feed on it all." Oh, it is a good thing when you cannot understand a revealed truth to feed on it, and when you find it to be good for your soul, you will not complain of its mystery. The Bible is dark to the Egyptians, but it is light to Israel.

Now look at *the gospel* itself. Why, there are many that sit and hear the gospel, and they say, "I do not understand this believing, this atonement, and so on." No, I know you do not; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. It is a savor of death unto death to you. I am afraid you will go on quarrelling with it until God ends the quarrel in your destruction. But if you are one of his, you will quarrel no longer, you will say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. The blessed way of salvation by atoning blood I do accept with avidity, and rejoice in it." That will prove you to be an Israelite; it will be a savor of life unto life to you.

Why, even the blessed *Lord Jesus Christ* has a dark side for sinners. If he were to come here this morning, oh, how gladly would I stand back to let him come forward and show his surpassing beauty. Why, some of you would think it heaven if you could but see him here and look into his pierced hands and side, and mark that blessed, marred, unutterably lovely visage. Yes, but it could not bring any joy to you who do not love him.

You do not trust him; and if the news were given out, "Christ has come," why, you would swoon with fear in your pews, for you would say, "He has come to judgement, and I am unprepared. He that is not my Saviour will be my judge, and sentence me to everlasting woe." There is a dark side in the Mediator to the Egyptians while there is a bright side to Israel.

Oh that ye would believe in Jesus Christ! Oh that

ye would "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little," for "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." You can come and be numbered with Israel, for the door into Israel is Christ himself. If you come to Christ you have come to his people, you have come to safety, and henceforth "the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward." Amen.

VIII.

PLEADING AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

August 17, 1884.

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"—EZEKIEL xviii. 23.

"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."—EZEKIEL xviii. 32.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" —EZEKIEL xxxiii. 11.

SIN having a thorough possession of the human heart, entrenches itself within the soul, as one who has taken a stronghold speedily attends to the repairing of the breaches, and the strengthening of the walls, lest haply he should be dislodged. Among the most subtle devices of sin to keep the soul under its power, and prevent the man's turning to God, is the slandering of the Most High by misrepresenting his character. As dust blinds the eye, so does sin prevent the sinner from seeing God aright. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;" but the wicked only see what they think to be God, and that, alas, is an image as unlike to God as possible! They say, for instance, that God is unmerciful, whereas he delighteth in mercy. The unfaithful servant in the parable was quite sure about it, and said most positively. "I knew that thou wast an austere man:" whereas the nature of God is as opposite to overbearing and exaction as light is from darkness.

When men once get this false idea of God into their minds they become hardened in heart: believing that it is useless to turn to God, they go on in their sins with greater determination. Either they conceive that God is implacable, or that he is indifferent to human prayers, or that if he should hear them yet he is not in the least likely to grant a favorable answer. Men darkly dream that God will not attend to the guilty and the miserable when they cry to him: that their prayers are not good enough for him: that he expects so much from his creatures that they cannot even pray so as to please him; that, in fact, he seeketh a quarrel against us, and is a taskmaster who will grind all he can out of us. Being themselves slow to forgive, they judge it to be highly unlikely that the Lord will pardon such sins as theirs. As they will not smile on the poor or the fallen, they conceive that the Lord will never receive unworthy ones into his favor. Thus they belie the Most High: they make him who is the best of Kings to be a tyrant; him who is the dearest of friends they regard as an enemy; and him whose very name is love they look upon as the embodiment of hate.

This is one of Satan's most mischievous devices to prevent repentance. As in the old times of plague they fastened up the house-door, and marked a red cross upon it, and thus the inhabitants of that dwelling were sealed unto death, even so the devil writes upon the man's door the words, "*no hope*," and then the sick soul determines to die, and refuses admission to the Physician. No man sins more unreservedly than he who sins in desperation, believing that there is no pardon for him from God. An assault where the watchword is "No quarter" usually provokes a terrible defence. The pirate who is hopeless of pardon becomes reckless in his deeds of blood. Many

a burglar in the old time actually went on to murder without remorse, because he thought he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. When a man believes that there is no hope for him in the right way, he determines that he will get what he can out of the wrong way; and if he cannot please God, he will, at least, please himself. If he must go to hell, he will be as merry as he can on the road, and, as he puts it, he will "die game." All this comes of a mistaken view of God. Do you not see the likeness between sin and falsehood? They are twin brothers. Holiness is truth, but sin is a lie, and the mother of lies. Sin brings forth falsehood, and then falsehood nourishes sin. Especially in this fashion doth falsehood maintain sin, by calumniating the God of love. He is a God ready to pardon, and by no means hard to be moved to forgiveness; why do men stand off from confessing their wrong, and finding mercy? He is not a God who taketh pleasure in the miseries of men; why do they think so ill of him? His ear is not dull to the cry of sorrow, his heart is not slow to compassionate distress; on the contrary, he waiteth to be gracious, "his mercy endureth for ever," he delighteth in mercy; why will men run from him? God is love immeasurable, love constant, boundless, endless.

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who hath grace so rich and free?"

Part of our business as ministers of Christ is to bear witness to the loving-kindness of the Lord against the falsehood with which sin dishonors his goodness. I desire to do so this morning, and to do it in right down earnest, in the hope that those of you who are convinced of sin may this day be able to rest in the mercy of God,

—even that exceeding mercy which he has revealed in Jesus Christ, his Son.

I have been very much struck with several letters which I have this week received from deeply-wounded souls. God is at work among us with the sword of conviction. I have felt a great degree of joy in receiving these letters; painful as they are to their writers, they are very hopeful to me. I am sorry that any persons should be near despair, and should continue in that condition; but anything is better than indifference. I am not sorry to see souls shut up in the prison of the law, for I hope they will soon come out of the prison-house into the full liberty of faith in Christ. I must confess my preference for these old-fashioned forms of conviction: it is my judgment that they produce better and more stable believers than the modern superficial methods. I am glad to see the Holy Spirit overturning, throwing down, digging out the foundations, and making you like cleared ground, that he may build upon you temples for his praise. How earnestly do I pray that the Lord may make of these convinced ones champions for the doctrines of free grace, comforters for his mourners, and consecrated servants of his kingdom! I look for large harvests from this deep subsoil ploughing. The Lord grant it, for his name's sake!

I can see in several who have written to me that their main idea is erroneous; that they have fallen into a wrong notion about God: they do not conceive of him as the good and gracious God which he really is. This error I am eager to correct. Listen to me, ye mourners. I desire to tell you nothing but sober truth. God forbid that I should misrepresent God for your comfort! Job asked his friends, "Will ye talk deceitfully for God?" and my answer to that question is,—"Never." I would

not utter what I believed to be falsehood concerning the Lord, even though the evil one offered me the bait of saving all mankind thereby. I have noticed in certain Revival Meetings a wretched lowering of the truth upon many points in order to afford encouragement to men; but all such sophistry ends in utter failure. Comfort based upon the suppression of truth is worse than useless. Lasting consolation must come to sinners from the sure truth of God; or else in the day when they most want it their hopes will depart from them, as the giving up of the ghost. I will therefore speak to you the truth in its simplicity concerning the blessed God whose servant I am. I beseech you no longer to persevere in your slander of his infinite love. Oh, you that feel your sin, and dare not put your trust in your forgiving God, I pray you to learn of him, and know him aright, for then shall that text be fulfilled in you,—"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." May the Holy Spirit come now in all his brightness, that you may see God in his own light! As for me, I feel my duty to be one in which nothing can avail me but that same Spirit. Chrysostom used to wonder that any minister could be saved, seeing our responsibilities are so great; I am entirely of his mind. Pray for me that I may be faithful to men's souls.

Notice, that in each one of my texts the Lord declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but in each following passage the statement is stronger. The Lord puts it first as a matter of *question.* As if he were surprised that such a thing should be laid to his door, he appeals to man's own reason, and asks, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" Oh, souls, can you really think that

God desires your damnation? Can you be so demented as soberly to believe such a calumny? Will such a theory hold water for a single minute? After all the goodness of God to multitudes of rebellious men, can you allow such a dark thought to linger near your mind, that God can have pleasure in men's being sinners, and ultimately destroying themselves by their iniquities? Your own common-sense must teach you that the good God is grieved to see men sin, that he would be glad to see men of a better mind, and that it is sad work to him to punish the finally obstinate and impenitent. He cries most plaintively "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." He puts it here as a question of wonderment, that men should so grossly malign him as to think that the God of love could have any pleasure in men's perishing by their sins.

But then, in the next place, in our second text, God makes *a positive assertion.* Knowing the human heart, he foresaw that a question would not be enough to end this matter, for man would say, "He only asked the question, but he did not give a plain and positive statement to the contrary." He gives us that clear assurance in our second text: "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." When the Lord speaks he is to be believed, for he is God that cannot lie. We know that this speech of his is authentic; it comes to us by an inspired prophet, concerning whose call by God we entertain no doubt whatever. Let us, then, believe it heartily. If I were to state this as my own opinion, you might do as you pleased about believing it; but since God saith this, then we claim of you all, as God's creatures, that you believe your Creator, and that this statement be never questioned again. "Where the word of a king is, there is power,"

—power, I trust, to silence all further debate upon the willingness of God to save.

But still, as if to end forever the strange and ghastly supposition that God takes delight in human destruction, my third text seals the truth with the *solemn oath* of the Eternal. He lifts his hand to heaven, and swears; and because he can swear by no greater he swears by himself,—not by his temple, nor by his throne therein, nor by his angels, nor by anything outside of himself; but he sweareth by his own life. Jehovah that liveth for ever and ever saith, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." The man who dares to doubt the oath of God will be guilty of an arrogant presumption which I would not like to impute to one of you. Shall God be perjured? I tremble at having even suggested such a thing; and yet if you do not believe the Lord's own oath you will not only have made him a liar, but you will have denied the value of his oath when he swears by his own life. What he thus affirms must be true; let us bow before it, and never entertain a doubt about it. Most miserable of all men that breathe must they be who will dare to attack the veracity of God, when God to confirm their confidence doth put himself upon an oath. Let us hear the voice of the Lord in its majesty, like a peal of distant thunder,—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

I invite your earnest consideration of this utterance thus given in the form of a question, an assertion, and a solemn oath.

I. And I notice, first, the assertion that GOD FINDS NO PLEASURE IN A SINNER'S DEATH. Really I feel ashamed to

have to answer the cruel libel which is here suggested; yet it is the English of many a man's doubts. He dares not come to God and trust him because he darkly dreams that God is a terrible Being who does not wish to save him, who is unwilling to forgive him, unwilling to receive him into his favor. He suspects that God finds some kind of terrible delight in a soul's damnation. That cannot be. I need not disprove the falsehood. God swears to the contrary, and the falsehood vanishes like smoke. I will only bring forward certain evidence by which you who are still under the deadly influence of the falsehood may be delivered.

First, *consider the great paucity of God's judgments among the sons of men.* There are people who are always talking of judgments, but they are in error. If a theatre is burnt down, or if a boat is upset on the sabbath, they cry, "Behold a judgment!" Yet churches and meeting-houses are burned, and missionaries are drowned when upon the Lord's own business. It is wrong to set down everything that happens as a judgment, for in so doing you will fall into the error of Job's friends, and condemn the innocent. The fact is there are but few acts of divine providence to individuals which can definitely be declared to be judgments. There are such things, but they are wonderfully rare in this life, considering the way in which the Lord is daily provoked by presumption and blasphemy. It was a judgment when Pharaoh's hosts were drowned in the Red Sea; that was a judgment when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram went down alive into the pit. There were judgments later on in the church of God when Ananias and Sapphira fell dead for lying against the Holy Ghost, and when Elymas the sorcerer was blinded for opposing Paul. Still, these are few; and in later days the authentic instances are equally

rare. Does not the Lord himself say that "judgment is his strange work"? Among his own people there is a constant judgment of fatherly discipline, but the outer world is left to the gentle *règime* of mercy. This is the age of patience and long-suffering. If God had taken any pleasure in the death of the wicked, some of you who are now present would long ago have gone down to hell; but he hath not dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. If God were constantly dealing out judgment for lying, how many who are now here would by this time have received their portion in the burning lake! If judgments for Sabbath-breaking had been commonly dealt out, this city of London would have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. But God reserveth his wrath till the day of wrath; for a while he winketh at man's obstinacy, for this is not the place of judgment, but of forbearance and hope. The fewness of visible deeds of judgment upon ungodly men in this life proves that God takes no delight in them.

And then, secondly, *the length of God's long-suffering before the Day of Judgment itself comes* proves how he wills not the death of men. The Lord spares many guilty men throughout three-score years and ten, bearing with their ill-manners in a way which ought to excite our loving gratitude. Youthful folly is succeeded by manhood's deliberate fault, and that, by the persistence of mature years, and yet the Lord remains patient! Some of you have rejected Christ after having heard the gospel for many years; you have stifled your conscience when it has cried against you, and you have done despite to the Spirit of God. You have rebelled against the light, and have committed greater and yet greater sin, but God has not cut you down. If he had

found pleasure in your death, would he have suffered you to live so long? You have cumbered the ground, not two or three years, as the barren fig-tree did, but two or three scores of years you have stood fruitless in the vineyard of God; and yet he spares you! Some have gone beyond all this, for they have provoked God by their open unbelief, and by their abominable speeches against himself, his Son, and his people. They have tried to thrust their finger into the eye of God; they have spit in the face of the Well-beloved, and persecuted him in the person of his people. Yet the Lord has not killed them out of hand, as he might justly have done. Have you not heard his sword stirring in its scabbard? It would have leaped forth from its sheath if mercy had not thrust it back, and pleaded, "O thou sword of the Lord, rest and be quiet!" It is only because his compassions fail not that you are favored with the loving invitations of the gospel. Only because of his infinite patience doth grace still wrestle with human sin and unbelief. Let us each one cry—

> "Lord, and am I yet alive,
> Not in torments, not in hell!
> Still doth thy good Spirit strive—
> With the chief of sinners dwell?
> Tell it unto sinners, tell,
> I am, I am out of hell!"

Furthermore, remember *the perfection of the character of God as the moral ruler of the Universe.* He is the Judge of all, and he must do right. Now, if a judge upon the bench were known to take delight in the punishment of offenders, he ought to be removed at once, for it would be clear that he was thoroughly unfit for his office. A man who would take pleasure in hanging, or

imprisoning, would be of the foul breed of Jude Jeffreys, and other monsters, from whom I trust our bench is for ever purged. But if I heard it said that a judge never pronounced the sentence of death without tears, that when he came home from the court, and remembered that some had been banished for life by the sentences which he had been bound to deliver, he sat in a moody, unhappy state all the evening, I should say, "Yes, that is the kind of person to be a judge." Aversion to punishment is necessary to justice in a judge. Such an one is God, who taketh no pleasure either in sin, or in the punishment which is the consequence of sin; he hates both sin and its consequence, and only comes at last to heavy blows with men when everything else has failed. When the sinner must be condemned, or else the foundations of society would be out of course, then he delivers the terrible sentence, but even then it is with unfeigned reluctance, and he cries, "How can I give thee up?" The Great Judge of all seems to descend from the glory of his judgment-seat, and show his more familiar face to you in the text, as in effect he cries, "I have judged, and I have condemned, and I have punished; but, as I live, I find no pleasure in all this, my pleasure comes when men turn unto me and live."

If any further thoughts were necessary to correct your misbelief, I would mention *the graciousness of his work in saving those who turn from their evil ways.* The care which the Most High has taken to produce repentance, the alacrity with which he accepts it, and the abounding love manifested to returning prodigals, are all evidences indisputable that God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in their salvation. To prevent the death of the wicked the Lord devised a

plan of salvation before all worlds; and those who accept that plan find that the Lord has provided for them a Substitute in the person of his own dear Son, who is indeed his own self; and that in his person God himself has borne the penalty due to sin, that thus the law might be solemnly honored, and the divine justice vindicated. The Lord has gone up to the tree, and bled his life away thereon, that God might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus: does not this prove his delight in salvation? The Holy Spirit comes on purpose to renew the heart, and take the stone away from it, that men may become tender and penitent—does not this show that God delights to save? The whole resources of the Godhead go forth with spontaneous delight for the salvation of those who turn from their sin; yea, they go forth before men turn, to turn them that they may be turned. God is even found of them that sought him not, and he sends his grace to those who cried not after it. As if God were indignant that such a charge should be laid against him that he delighteth in the death of any, he preferred to die himself upon the tree rather than let a world of sinners sink to hell. To prove the desire of God that men should live, his Son abode for thirty years and more on this poor earth as a man among men, and his Holy Spirit has dwelt in men for all these centuries, bearing all the provocations of an erring and ungrateful people. God has proved himself in multitudes of ways to be not the Destroyer, but the Preserver of men. "He that is our God is the God of salvation." "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord."

Thus would I try to vindicate the ways of God to men. When men are to be tried for their lives, if their friends are able to do so, they come to them in prison,

and say, "It is a very hopeful thing for you that it is not Judge So-and-So, who is terribly severe; you are to be tried before the kindest man on the bench." Many a prisoner has plucked up courage at such news; and oh, poor sinner, you who dare not trust God, let me chide you into hope by reminding you that Love sits embodied on the throne of judgment this day; and that he who must and will condemn you, if you turn not from your sins, nevertheless will find no pleasure in that condemnation, but will be loth to make bare the axe of execution. Will you not turn to him and live? Do not his compassions beckon you to make a full surrender, and find grace in his sight?

II. But now, secondly, GOD FINDS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT THAT MEN MUST TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, OR DIE. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." It is one or the other: turn or burn. God, with all his love to men, cannot discover any third course: men cannot keep their sins and yet be saved. The sin must die or the sinner must die.

Be it known to you first, that when God proclaims mercy to men upon this condition, that they turn from their ways, *this proclamation is issued out of pure grace.* As a matter of bare right, repentance does not bring mercy with it. Does a murderer receive pardon because he regrets his deed? Does a thief escape from prison because at last he comes to be sorry that he was not honest? Repentance makes no available amends for the evil which is done; the evil still remains, and the punishment must be executed. It is of grace, then, that I am permitted to say, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." It is because at the back of it there is a great sacrifice; it is through an all-sufficient atone-

ment that repentance becomes acceptable. The Son of God has bled and died, and made expiation for sin; and now he is exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins. To-day the word of the Lord is, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is not according to the law, which gives no space for repentance, but it is a pure matter of grace. God saves you, not because of any merit in your turning, but because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he has decreed to save all who turn from the paths of evil.

Note, next, that *if there be no repentance men must be punished, for on any other theory there is an end of moral government.* The worst thing that could happen to a world of men would be for God to say "I retract my law; I will neither reward virtue, nor punish iniquity; do as you like." Then the earth would be a hell indeed. The greatest enemy to civil government among men is the man who preaches universal salvation,—salvation apart from a change of heart and life. Such teachers are a danger to national order, they remove the foundation of the commonwealth. They practically say, "Do just as you like; it may make a slight difference to you for a little while, but it will soon be over, and villains and saints will share an equal heaven." Such talk is damnable! I can say no less. If there is to be a government at all, it is necessary that sin should not go unpunished; leniency to the dishonest is cruelty to those whom they injure. To save the murderer is to kill the innocent. It were an evil day for heaven and earth if it could once be proven that God would reward the depraved in the same way as the sanctified: then would

the foundation be removed, and what would the righteous do? A God who was not just would be a poor Ruler of the universe.

Yes, my hearers, sin must be punished; you must turn from it or die, because *sin is its own punishment.* When we talk to you of the fire that never can be quenched, and the worm that dieth not, we are supposed to mean those literal things; but indeed these are figures, figures representing something more terrible than themselves: the fire is the burning of a furious rebellion in the soul, and the worm is the torture of a never-dying conscience. Sin is hell. Within the bowels of disobedience there lieth a world of misery. God has so constituted us, and rightly so, that we cannot long be evil and happy; we must, if we go wrong, ultimately become wretched; and the more wrong we are, and the longer we continue in that wrong, the more assuredly are we heaping up sorrow for ourselves throughout eternity. Holiness and right produce happiness, but iniquity and wrong must, by a necessity of nature which never can be changed, produce tribulation and anguish. It must be so. Even the omnipotence of God cannot make an impenitent sinner happy. You must turn from sin, or turn to misery; you must either renounce your sins, or else renounce all hope of a blissful eternity. You cannot be married to Christ and heaven until yon are divorced from sin and self.

I believe that *every man's conscience bears witness to this* if it be at all honest. There are consciences of a very curious kind about at this time—abortions, and not true consciences at all. I find men deliberately acting upon crooked policy, and yet they talk of truth and holiness. Yet every conscience that is not drunken with the mixed wine of pride and unbelief, will tell a

man that when he does evil he cannot expect to be approved; that if he neglects to do good he cannot expect to have the same reward as if he had done the good,—that, in fact, there must be, in the nature of things, a penalty attached to crime. Conscience says as much as that, and now God himself, who taketh no pleasure in the death of the wicked, puts it to you,—you must repent or perish. If you go on in your evil ways, you must be lost. There must be a turning from sin, or the Most High God can never look upon you with favor. Do you hear this? Oh, that you would let it sink into your heart, and work repentance in you!

III. This leads me on to the third point, which is a joyful one: GOD FINDS PLEASURE IN MEN'S TURNING FROM SIN. Read the passage again:—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Among the highest of the divine joys is the pleasure of seeing a sinner turn from evil. God delights in those first thoughts which men have towards himself, when being careless heretofore they on a sudden begin to reflect upon their ways, and consider their condition before God. He looks with pleasure upon you who have aforetime been wild and thoughtless, who at last meditate upon Eternity, and weigh the future of sin and judgment. When you listen to that inviting word, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," God is pleased to observe your attention. When you begin to feel, "I am sorry for my sin; oh, that I had never committed it!" he hears your sigh. When your heart is sick of sin, when you loathe all evil, and feel that though you cannot get away from it, yet you would if you could, then he looks down on you with pitying eye. When there is a new will springing up in

your heart, by his good grace,—a will to obey and believe, then also the Father smiles. When he hears within you a moaning and a sighing after the Father's house and the Father's bosom; you cannot see him, but he is behind the wall listening to you. His hand is secretly putting your tears into his bottle, and his heart is feeling compassion for you. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Mark that last character: the man has only a little hope, but the Lord taketh pleasure in him. When yet the good work is only in the twilight, God is as pleased with it as watchmen are pleased with the first beams of morning light, ay, he is more glad than they that watch for the morning. When at last you come to prayer, and begin to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," God is well pleased; for here he sees clear signs that you are coming to yourself and to him. His Spirit saith, "Behold, he prayeth!" and he takes this as a token for good. When you unfeignedly forsake sin God sees you do it, and he is so glad that his holy angels spy out his joy.

I am sure that God watches the struggles of those who endeavor to escape from old habits and evil ways. When you try to conquer vile thoughts, when at the end of the day you sit down and cry over the day's failures because you did not get as well through the day as you hoped to do, the Lord observes your desires and your lamentations. Just as a mother tenderly watches her child when it begins to walk, and smiles as she sees it toddling from chair to chair, and puts out her finger to help it, so doth God take pleasure in your early attempts after holiness, your longings to overcome sin, your sighings and cryings to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. God saith, "I taught Ephraim

to go, taking them by their arms," and in the same way he is teaching you.

I will tell you what pleases him most of all, and that is when you come to his dear Son, and say, "Lord, something tells me that there is no hope for me, but I do not believe that voice. I read in thy word that thou wilt cast out none that come unto thee, and lo, I come! I am the biggest sinner that ever did come, but Lord, I believe thy promise; I am as unworthy as the devil himself, but Lord, thou dost not ask for worthiness, but only for childlike confidence. Cast me not away—I rest in thee." "Without faith it is impossible to please God," but it gives God a divine pleasure to see the first grain of mustard seed of faith in a poor, turning sinner's heart. Oh, I wish you would think of this, you that keep on condemning yourselves! When you write me those letters, full of self-condemnation, you please *me;* and if you please me, I am sure you much more please God, who is so much more tender than ever I can be, though I would fain try and humbly imitate him. How I wish I could bring you to trust my Lord this morning, and end those cruel doubts and fears!

"Artful doubts and reasonings be
Nailed with Jesus to the tree."

God's great convincing argument is his dying, bleeding Son. Oh, ye chief of sinners, turn to him, and God will have pleasure in your turning! Do you not know that all these thoughts towards him are breathed into you by his Spirit? All those regrets for sin, those desires after holiness, and specially those trustings in Christ, those hopings in his mercy, are all his work: they would never have been found in your soul if the Spirit had not put them there. If I saw a fair flower growing on a

dunghill, I should conclude that a gardener had been there some day or other, and had cast seed upon the heap. And when I see your soul commencing to pray, and hope, and trust, I say to myself, "God is there. The Holy Spirit has been at work there, or else there would not have been even that feeble trusting, and that faint hoping." Wherefore, be of good courage, you are drawing near to a gracious God.

During the rest of your life, when you go on fighting with sin, and when you consecrate yourself to Jesus, when you wash your Saviour's feet with your tears, and wipe them with the hairs of your head with the Magdalen, or when you break your alabaster-box of myrrh, and pour it on the Master's head with Mary, the Lord hath great pleasure in you for Jesus' sake. He taketh no pleasure in the groans and cries of hell, but in the repentance of sinners he hath joy. The fires of Gehenna give him no delight, but penitents smiting on their breasts, and believers beholding Christ with tearful eyes, are a royal spectacle to him. It must be so, he swears it, and it must be true. Cease your quibbling, and believe unto eternal life.

IV. Lastly, since he hath pleasure in men's turning to him, GOD THEREFORE EXHORTS TO IT, AND ADDS AN ARGUMENT. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He perceives his poor creature standing with his back to him, looking to idols, looking to sinful pleasures, looking towards the city of destruction, and what does God say to him? He says, "Turn!" It is a very plain direction; is it not? "Turn," or "Right about face!" That is all. "I thought," saith one, "I was to feel so much anguish and so much agony." I should not wonder if you do feel it, but all that God says is, "Turn." You now face the wrong way; "Turn," and

face the right way. That turning is true repentance. A changed life is of the essence of repentance; and that must spring from a changed heart, from a changed desire, from a changed will. God saith, "Turn ye." Oh, that you would hear and obey!

Notice how he puts it in the present tense—"Turn ye, turn ye," not to-morrow, but now. Nobody will be saved to-morrow: all who are saved, are saved to-day. "Now is the accepted time." "Turn ye." Oh, by the infinite mercy of God, who will enable you to turn, I do pray you to turn from every evil, from every self-confidence, unto God. No turning but turning to God is worth having. If the Lord turn you, you will turn to himself, and to confidence alone in him, and to his service and his fear.

"Turn ye, turn ye." See, the Lord puts it twice. He must mean your good by these repeated directions. Suppose my man-servant was crossing yonder river, and I saw that he would soon be out of his depth, and so in great danger; suppose I cried out to him, "Stop! stop! If you go another inch you will be drowned. Turn back! Turn back!" Will anybody dare to say, "Mr. Spurgeon would feel pleasure if that man were drowned"? It would be a cruel cut. What a liar the man must be who would hint such a thing when I am urging my servant to turn and save his life! Would God plead with us to escape unless he honestly desired that we should escape? I trow not. Every sinner may be sure that God takes no pleasure in his death when he pleads with him in these unrivaled words, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" There is what the old divines used to call an ingemination, an inward groaning, a reduplication of pleading in these words, "Turn ye, turn ye." He pleads each time with more of emphasis. Will you not hear?

Then he finishes up with asking men to find a reason why they should die. There ought to be a weighty reason to induce a man to die. "Why will ye die?" This is an unanswerable question in reference to death eternal. Is there anything to be desired in eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power? Can there be any gain in losing your own soul? Can there be any profit in going away into everlasting punishment. Can there possibly be anything to be wished for and desired in being cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. O souls, be not unreasonable! Do not neglect this great salvation. It must be the most awful thing in all the world to die in your sins; why do you choose it? Do you desire shipwreck? Why hug that rocky shore, and tempt destruction? Will you eat the poisoned dainties of sin because they are sugared with a little present pleasure? In the end, the gall of bitterness will fill your bowels. I am no flatterer: I dare not be, for I love you, and would persuade you to turn unto the Lord. There is a flower that always turns to the sun; oh, that you would in the same manner turn to God! Why turn away from him? "WHY?" is a little word, but how much it takes to answer its demands! WHY do you continue in sin? WHY do you refuse to believe your Saviour? WHY will you provoke God? WHY will you die? Turn round and say, "Oh, God, I cannot bear to perish everlastingly, and therefore I cannot endure to live in sin. May thy rich grace help me!

Oh, that you would trust in the Lord Jesus! Repose in him, and in his finished work, and all is well. Did I hear you say, "I will pray about it"? Better trust at once. Pray as much as you like after you have trusted, but what is the good of unbelieving prayers? "I will

talk with a godly man after the service." I charge you first trust in Jesus. Go home alone, trusting in Jesus. "I should like to go into the enquiry-room." I dare say you would, but we are not willing to pander to popular superstition. We fear that in those rooms men are warmed into a fictitious confidence. Very few of the supposed converts of enquiry-rooms turn out well. Go to your God at once, even where you now are. Cast yourself on Christ, now, at once; ere you stir an inch! In God's name I charge you, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

IX.

"THOUGH HE WERE DEAD."

September 14, 1884.

"Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"—JOHN xi. 24–26.

MARTHA is a very accurate type of a class of anxious believers. They do believe truly, but not with such confidence as to lay aside their care. They do not distrust the Lord, or question the truth of what he says, yet they puzzle their brain about "How shall this thing be?" and so they miss the major part of the present comfort which the word of the Lord would minister to their hearts if they received it more simply. *How?* and *why?* belong unto the Lord. It is his business to arrange matters so as to fulfil his own promises. If we would sit at our Lord's feet with Mary, and consider what he has promised, we should choose a better part than if we ran about with Martha, crying, "How can these things be?"

Martha, you see, in this case, when the Lord Jesus Christ told her that her brother would rise again, replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She was a type, I say, of certain anxious believers, for she *set a practical bound to the Saviour's words.* "Of course there will be a resurrection, and then my brother will rise with the rest." She concluded that the Saviour could not mean anything be-

yond that. The first meaning and the commonest meaning that suggests itself to her must be what Jesus means. Is not that the way with many of us? We had a statesman once, and a good man too, who loved reform; but whenever he had accomplished a little progress, he considered that all was done. We called him at last "Finality John," for he was always coming to an ultimatum, and taking for his motto "Rest and be thankful." Into that style Christian people too frequently drop with regard to the promises of God. We limit the Holy One of Israel as to the meaning of his words. Of course they mean so much, but we cannot allow that they intend more. It were well if the spirit of progress would enter into our faith, so that we felt within our souls that we had never beheld the innermost glory of the Lord's words of grace. We often wonder that the disciples put such poor meanings upon our Lord's words, but I fear we are almost as far off as they were from fully comprehending all his gracious teachings. Are we not still as little children, making little out of great words? Have we grasped as yet a tithe of our Lord's full meaning, in many of his sayings of love? When he is talking of bright and sparkling gems of benediction, we are thinking of common pebble-stones in the brook of mercy; when he speaketh of stars and heavenly crowns, we think of sparks and childish coronals of fading flowers. Oh that we could but have our intellect cleared; better still, could have our understanding expanded, or, best of all, our faith increased, so as to reach to the height of our Lord's great arguments of love!

Martha also had another fault in which she was very like ourselves: she *laid the words of Jesus on the shelf*, as things so trite and sure that they were of small practical importance. "Thy brother shall rise again." Now, if

she had possessed faith enough, she might truthfully have said, "Lord, I thank thee for that word! I expect within a short space to see him sitting at the table with thee. I put the best meaning possible upon thy words, for I know that thou art always better than I can think thee to be; and therefore I expect to see my beloved Lazarus walk home from the sepulchre before the sun sets again." But no, she lays the truth aside as a matter past all dispute, and says, "I know that my brother shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." A great many precious truths are laid up by us like the old hulks in the Medway, never to see service any more, or like aged pensioners at Chelsea, as relics of the past. We say "Yes, quite true, we fully believe that doctrine." Somehow it is almost as bad to lay up a doctrine in lavender as it is to throw it out of window. When you so believe a truth as to put it to bed and smother it with the bolster of neglect, it is much the same as if you did not believe it at all. An official belief is very much akin to infidelity. Some persons never question a doctrine: that is not their line of temptation; they accept the gospel as true, but then they never expect to see its promises practically carried out; it is a proper thing to believe, but by no means a prominent, practical factor in actual life. It is true but it is mysterious, misty, mythical, far removed from the realm of practical common sense. We do with the promises often as a poor old couple did with a precious document, which might have cheered their old age had they used it according to its real value. A gentleman stepping into a poor woman's house saw framed and glazed upon the wall a French note for a thousand francs. He said to the old folks, "How came you by this?" They informed him that a poor French soldier had been taken in by them and nursed until he

died, and he had given them that little picture when he was dying as a memorial of him. They thought it such a pretty souvenir that they had framed it, and there it was adorning the cottage wall. They were greatly surprised when they were told that it was worth a sum which would be quite a little fortune for them if they would but turn it into money. Are we not equally unpractical with far more precious things? Have you not certain of the words of your great Lord framed and glazed in your hearts, and do you not say to yourselves, "They are so sweet and precious"? and yet you have never turned them into actual blessing—never used them in the hour of need. You have done as Martha did when she took the words, "Thy brother shall rise again," and put round about them this handsome frame, "in the resurrection at the last day." Oh that we had grace to turn God's bullion of gospel into current coin, and use them as our present spending money.

Moreover, Martha made another blunder, and that was *setting the promise in the remote distance.* This is a common folly, this distancing the promises of the Most High. "In the resurrection at the last day"—no doubt she thought it a very long way off, and therefore she did not get much comfort out of it. Telescopes are meant to bring objects near to the eye, but I have known people use the mental telescope in the wrong way: they always put the big end of it to their eye, and then the glass sends the object further away. Her brother was to be raised that very day: she might so have understood the Saviour, but instead of it she looked at his words through the wrong end of the glass, and said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Brethren, do not refuse the present blessing. Death and heaven, or the advent and the glory, are at

your doors. A little while and he that will come shall come, and will not tarry. Think not that the Lord is slack concerning his promise. Do not say in your heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming"; or dream that his words of love are only for the dim future. In the ages to come marvels shall be revealed, but even the present hour is bejewelled with loving-kindness. To-day the Lord has rest, and peace, and joy to give to you. Lose not these treasures by unbelief.

Martha also appears to me to have *made the promise unreal and impersonal.* "Thy brother shall rise again": to have realized that would have been a great comfort to her, but she mixes Lazarus up with all the rest of the dead. "Yes, he will rise in the resurrection at the last day; when thousands of millions shall be rising from their graves, no doubt Lazarus will rise with the rest." That is the way with us: we take the promise and say, "This is true to all the children of God." If so it is true to us; but we miss *that* point. What a blessing God has bestowed upon the covenanted people! Yes, and you are one of them: but you shake your head, as if the word was not for you. It is a fine feast, and yet you are hungry; it is a full and flowing stream, but you remain thirsty. Why is this? Somehow the generality of your apprehension misses the sweetness which comes of personal appropriation. There is such a thing as speaking of the promises in a magnificent style, and yet being in deep spiritual poverty; as if a man should boast of the wealth of old England, and the vast amount of treasure in the Bank, while he does not possess a penny wherewith to bless himself. In your case you know it is your own fault that you are poor and miserable, for if you would but exercise an appropriating faith you might possess a boundless heritage. If you are a child of God

all things are yours, and you may help yourself. If you are hungry at this banquet it is for want of faith: if you are thirsty by the brink of this river it is because you do not stoop down and drink. Behold, God is your portion: the Father is your shepherd, the Son of God is your food, and the Spirit of God is your comforter. Rejoice and be glad, and grasp with the firm hand of a personal faith that royal boon which Jesus sets before you in his promises.

I beg you to observe how the Lord Jesus Christ in great wisdom dealt with Martha. In the first place, he did not grow angry with her. There is not a trace of petulance in his speech. He did not say to her, "Martha, I am ashamed of you that you should have such low thoughts of me." She thought that she was honoring Jesus when she said,—"I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Her idea of Jesus was that he was a great prophet who would ask of God and obtain answers to his prayers; she has not grasped the truth of his own personal power to give and sustain life. But the Saviour did not say, "Martha, these are low and grovelling ideas of your Lord and Saviour." He did not chide her, though she lacked wisdom,—wisdom which she ought to have possessed. I do not think God's people learn much by being scolded; it is not the habit of the great Lord to scold his disciples, and therefore they do not take it well when his servants take upon themselves to rate them. If ever you meet one of the Lord's own who falls far short of the true ideal of the gospel, do not bluster and upbraid. Who taught you what you know? He that has taught you did it of his infinite love and grace and pity, and he was very tender with you, for you were doltish enough; therefore be tender with others and give them line upon line, even

as your Lord was gentle towards you. It ill becomes a servant to lose patience where his Master shows so much.

The Lord Jesus, with gentle spirit, proceeded to teach her more of the things concerning himself. More of Jesus! More of Jesus! That is the sovereign cure for our faults. He revealed himself to her, that in him she might behold reasons for a clearer hope and a more substantial faith. How sweetly fell those words upon her ear: "I am the resurrection and the life"! Not "I can get resurrection by my prayers," but "I am, myself, the resurrection." God's people need to know more of what Jesus is, more of the fulness which it has pleased the Father to place in him. Some of them know quite enough of what they are themselves, and they will break their hearts if they go on reading much longer in that black-letter book: they need, I say, to rest their eyes upon the person of their Lord, and to spy out all the riches of grace which lie hidden in him; then they will pluck up courage, and look forward with surer expectancy. When our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life," he indicated to Martha that resurrection and life were not gifts which he must seek, nor even boons which he must create; but that he himself was the resurrection and the life: these things were wherever he was. He was the author, and giver, and maintainer of life, and that life was himself. He would have her to know that he was himself precisely what she wanted for her brother. She did know a little of the Lord's power, for she said, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," which being very kindly interpreted might mean, "Lord, thou art the life." "Ah, but," saith Jesus, "you must also learn that I am the resurrection! You already admit that if I had been here Lazarus would not

have died; I would have you further learn that I being here your brother shall live though he has died; and that when I am with my people none of them shall die for ever, for I am to them the resurrection and the life." Poor Martha was looking up into the sky for life, or gazing down into the deeps for resurrection, when the Resurrection and the Life stood before her, smiling upon her, and cheering her heavy heart. She had thought of what Jesus might have done if he had been there before; now let her know what he *is* at the present moment.

Thus I have introduced the text to you, and I pray God the Holy Spirit to bless these prefatory observations; for if we learn only these first lessons we shall not have been here in vain. Let us construe promises in their largest sense, let us regard them as real, and set them down as facts. Let us look to the Promiser, even to Jesus the Lord, and not so much to the difficulties which surround the accomplishment of the promise. In beginning the divine life let us look to Jesus, and in afterwards running the heavenly race let us still be looking unto Jesus, till we see in him our all in all. When both eyes look on Jesus we are in the light; but when we have one eye for him, and one eye for self, all is darkness. Oh, to see him with all our soul's eyes!

Now, I am going to speak as I am helped of the Spirit; and I shall proceed thus—first, by asking you to *view the text as a stream of comfort to Martha and other bereaved persons;* and, secondly, to *view it as a great deep of comfort to all believers.*

I. First, I long for you to VIEW THE TEXT AS A STREAM OF COMFORT TO MARTHA AND OTHER BEREAVED PERSONS.

Observe, in the beginning, that *the presence of Jesus Christ means life and resurrection.* It meant that to

Lazarus. If Jesus comes to Lazarus, Lazarus must live. Had Martha taken the Saviour's words literally, as she should have done, as I have already told you, she would have had immediate comfort from them; and the Saviour intended her to understand them in that sense. He virtually says, "I am to Lazarus the Power that can make him live again; and I am the Power that can keep him in life. Yea, I am the resurrection and the life." A statement so understood would have been very comfortable to her. Nothing could have been more so. It would there and then have abolished death so far as her brother was concerned. Somebody says, "But I do not see that this is any comfort *to us*, for if Jesus be here, yet it is only a spiritual presence, and we cannot expect to see our dear mother, or child, or husband raised from the dead thereby." I answer that our Lord Jesus is able at this moment to give us back our departed ones, for he is still the resurrection and the life. But let me ask you whether you really wish that Jesus would raise your departed ones from the dead. You say at first, "Of course I do wish it"; but I would ask you to reconsider that decision; for I believe that upon further thought you will say, "No, I could not wish it." Do you really desire to see your glorified husband sent back again to this world of care and pain? Would you have your father or mother deprived of the glories which they are now enjoying in order that they might help you in the struggles of this mortal life? Would you discrown the saints? You are not so cruel. That dear child, would you have it back from among the angels, and from the inner glory, to come here and suffer again? You would not have it so. And to my mind it is a comfort to you, or should be, that it is not within your power to have it so; because you might be tempted in some selfish

moment to accept the doubtful boon. Lazarus could return, and fit into his place again, but scarcely one in ten thousand could do so. There would be serious drawbacks in the return of those whom we have loved best. Do you cry, "Give back my father! Give me back my friend"? You know not what you ask. It might be a cause of regret to you as long as they lingered here, for you would each morning think to yourself, "Beloved one, I have brought you out of heaven by my wish. I have robbed you of infinite felicity to gratify myself." For my own part, I had rather that the Lord Jesus should keep the keys of death than that he should lend them to me. It would be too dreadful a privilege to be empowered to rob heaven of the perfected merely to give pleasure to imperfect ones below. Jesus would raise them now if he knew it to be right; I do not wish to take the government from his shoulder. It is more comfortable to me to think that Jesus Christ could give them back to me, and would if it were for his glory and my good. My dear ones that lie asleep could be awakened in an instant if the Master thought it best; but it would not be best, and therefore even I would hold his skirt, and say, "Tread softly, Master! Do not arouse them! I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me. It is not my wish they should return: it is better that they should be with thee where thou art, to behold thy glory." It does not seem to me, then, dear friend, that you are one whit behind Martha; and you ought to be comforted while Jesus says to you, "I am even now the resurrection and the life."

Furthermore, here is comfort which we may each one safely take, namely, that *when Jesus comes the dead shall live.* The Revised Version has it, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." We do not

know when our Lord will descend from heaven, but we do know the message of the angel, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The Lord will come; we may not question the certainty of his appearing. When he cometh, all his redeemed shall live with him. The trump of the archangel shall startle the happy sleepers, and they shall wake to put on their beauteous array; the body transformed and made like unto Christ's glorious body shall be once more wrapt about them as the vesture of their perfected and emancipated spirits. Then our brother shall rise again, and all our dear ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus the Lord will bring with him. This is the glorious hope of the church, wherein we see the death of death, and the destruction of the grave. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Then we are also told that *when Jesus comes, living believers shall not die.* After the coming of Christ there shall be no more death for his people. What does Paul say? "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all *die*, but we shall all be changed." Did I see a little school-girl put up her finger? Did I hear her say, "Please, sir, you made a mistake." So I did; I made it on purpose. Paul did not say, "We shall not all *die*," for the Lord had already said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never *die*"; so Paul would not say that any of us should die, but he used his Master's own term, and said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." When the Lord comes there will be no more death; we who are alive and remain (as some of us may be—we cannot tell) will undergo a sudden transformation—for flesh and blood, as they are, cannot inherit the kingdom of God—and by that transformation

our bodies shall be made meet to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." There shall be no more death then. Here, then, we have two sacred handkerchiefs with which to wipe the eyes of mourners: when Christ cometh the dead shall live; when Christ cometh those that live shall never die. Like Enoch, or Elias, we shall pass into the glory state without wading through the black stream, while those who have already forded it shall prove to have been no losers thereby. All this is in connection with Jesus. Resurrection with Jesus is resurrection indeed. Life in Jesus is life indeed. It endears us to resurrection, glory, eternal life, and ultimate perfection, when we see them all coming to us in Jesus. He is the golden pot which hath this manna, the rod which beareth these almonds, the life whereby we live.

But further, I have not made you drink deep enough of this stream yet,—I think our Saviour meant that *even now his dead are alive.* "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." Those that believe in Jesus Christ appear to die, but yet they live. They are not in the grave, they are for ever with the Lord. They are not unconscious, they are with their Lord in Paradise. Death cannot kill a believer, it can only usher him into a freer form of life. Because Jesus lives, his people live. God is not the God of the dead but of the living: those who have departed have not perished. We laid the precious body in the cemetery, and we set up stones at the head and foot; but we might engrave on them the Lord's words, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." True, an unbelieving generation may laugh us to scorn, but we scorn their laughing.

Again, *even now his living do not die.* There is an essential difference between the decease of the godly and the death of the ungodly. Death comes to the ungodly

man as a penal infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his Father's palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory. To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing. Death is ours; it is set down in the list of our possessions among the all things, and it follows life in the list as if it were an equal favor. No longer is it death to die. The name remains, but the thing itself is changed. Wherefore, then, are we in bondage through fear of death? Why do we dread the process which gives us liberty? I am told that persons who in the cruel ages had lain in prison for years suffered much more in the moment of the knocking off of their fetters than they had endured for months in wearing the hard iron; and yet I suppose that no man languishing in a dungeon would have been unwilling to stretch out his arm or leg, that the heavy chains might be beaten off by the smith. We should all be content to endure that little inconvenience to obtain lasting liberty. Now, such is death—the knocking off of the fetters; yet the iron may never seem to be so truly iron as when that last liberating blow of grace is about to fall. Let us not mind the harsh grating of the key as it turns in the lock; if we understand it aright it will be as music to our ears. Imagine that your last hour is come! The key turns with pain for a moment; but, lo, the bolt is shot! The iron gate is open! The spirit is free! Glory be unto the Lord for ever and ever!

II. I leave the text now as a stream of comfort for the bereaved, for I wish you to VIEW IT AS A GREAT DEEP OF COMFORT FOR ALL BELIEVERS. I cannot fathom it, any more than I could measure the abyss, but I can invite you to survey it by the help of the Holy Ghost.

Methinks, first, this text plainly teaches that *the Lord Jesus Christ is the life of his people.* We are dead by nature, and you can never produce life out of death: the essential elements are wanting. Should a spark be lingering among the ashes, you may yet fan it to a flame; but from human nature the last spark of heavenly life is gone, and it is vain to seek for life among the dead. The life of every Christian is Christ. He is the beginning of life, being the Resurrection: when he comes to us we live. Regeneration is the result of contact with Christ: we are begotten again unto living hope by his resurrection from the dead. The life of the Christian in its commencement is in Christ alone; not a fragment of it is from himself, and the continuance of that life is equally the same; Jesus is not only the resurrection to begin with, but the life to go on with. "I have life in myself," saith one. I answer—not otherwise than as you are one with Christ: your spiritual life in every breath it draws is in Christ. If you are regarded for a moment as separated from Christ, you are cast forth as a branch and are withered. A member severed from the head is dead flesh and no more. In union to Christ is your life. Oh that our hearers would understand this! I see a poor sinner look into himself, and look again, and then cry, "I cannot see any life within!" Of course you cannot; you have no life of your own. "Alas," cries a Christian, "I cannot find anything within to feed my soul with!" Do you expect to feed upon yourself? Must not Israel look up for the manna? Did one of all the tribes find it in his own bosom? To look to self is to turn to a broken cistern which can hold no water. I tell you you must learn that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, Hearken to that great "I"—that infinite Ego! This must cover over and swallow up your little *ego.* "I live;

yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." What are you? Less than nothing, and vanity; but over all springs up that divine, all-sufficient personality, "I am the resurrection and the life." Take the two first words together, and they seem to me to have a wondrous majesty about them—"I AM!" Here is self existence. Life in himself! Even as the Mediator, the Lord Jesus tells us that it is given him to have life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself (John v. 26). *I am* fills the yawning mouth of the sepulchre. He that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, declares, "*I am* the resurrection and the Life." If, then, I want to live unto God, I must have Christ; and if I desire to continue to live unto God I must continue to have Christ; and if I aspire to have that life developed to the utmost fulness of which it is capable, I must find it all in Christ. He has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Anything that is beyond the circle of Christ is death. If I conjure up an experience over which I foolishly dote, which puffs me up as so perfect that I need not come to Christ now as a poor empty-handed sinner, I have entered into the realm of death, I have introduced into my soul a damning leaven. Away with it! Away with it! Everything of life is put into this golden casket of Christ Jesus: all else is death. We have not a breath of life anywhere but in Jesus, who ever liveth to give life. He saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also," and this is true. We live not for any other reason—not because of anything in us or connected with us, but only because of Jesus. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Now, further, in this great deep to which we would conduct you, *faith is the only channel by which we can*

draw from Jesus our life. "I am the resurrection, and the life: *he that believeth in me*": that is it. He does not say, "He that loves me," though love is a bright grace, and very sweet to God: he does not say, "He that serves me," though every one that believes in Christ will endeavor to serve him; but it is not put so: he does not even say, "He that imitates me," though every one that believes in Christ must and will imitate him; but it is put, "He that believeth in me." Why is that? Why doth the Lord so continually make faith to be the only link between himself and the soul? I take it, because faith is a grace which arrogates nothing to itself, and has no operation apart from Jesus, to whom it unites us. You want to conduct the electric fluid, and, in order to this, you find a metal which will not create any action of its own; if it did so, it would disturb the current which you wish to send along it. If it set up an action of its own, how would you know the difference between what came of the metal and what came of the battery? Now, faith is an empty-handed receiver and communicator; it is nothing apart from that upon which it relies, and therefore it is suitable to be a conductor for grace. When an auditorium has to be erected for a speaker in which he may be plainly heard, the essential thing is to get rid of all echo. When you have no echo, then you have a perfect building: faith makes no noise of its own, it allows the Word to speak. Faith cries, "*Non nobis Domine!* Not unto us! Not unto us." Christ puts his crown on faith's head, exclaiming, "Thy faith hath saved thee;" but faith hastens to ascribe all the glory of salvation to Jesus only. So you see why the Lord selects faith rather than any other grace, because it is a self-forgetting thing. It is best adapted to be the tubing through which the water of life runs, because it will not

communicate a flavor of its own, but will just convey the stream purely and simply from Christ to the soul. "He that believeth in me."

Now notice, *to the reception of Christ by faith there is no limit.* "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever"—I am deeply in love with that word "whosoever." It is a splendid word. A person who kept many animals had some great dogs and some little ones, and in his eagerness to let them enter his house freely he had two holes cut in the door, one for the big dogs and another for the little dogs. You may well laugh, for the little dogs could surely have come in wherever there was room for the larger ones. This "whosoever" is the great opening, suitable for sinners of every size. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Has any man a right to believe in Christ? The gospel gives every creature the right to believe in Christ, for we are bidden to preach it to every creature, with this command, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Every man has a right to believe in Christ, because he will be damned if he does not, and he must have a right to do that which will bring him into condemnation if he does it not. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," and that makes it clear that I, whoever I may be, as I have a right to endeavor to escape from damnation, have a right to avail myself of the blessed command, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live." Oh that "whosoever," that hole in the door for the big dog! Do not forget it! Come along with you, and put your trust in Christ. If you can only get linked with Christ you are a living man; if but a finger touches his garment's hem you are made whole. Only the touch of faith, and the virtue flows

from him to you, and he is to you the resurrection and the life.

I desire you to notice that *there is no limit to this power.* Before I was ill this time, and even since, I have had to deal with such a swarm of despairing sinners, that if I have not pulled them up they have pulled me down. I have been trying to speak very large words for Christ when I have met with those disconsolate ones. I hear one say, "How far can Christ be life to a sinner? I feel myself to be utterly wrong, I am altogether wrong; there is nothing right about me: though I have eyes I cannot see, though I have ears I do not hear; if I have a hand I cannot use it, if I have a foot I cannot run with it—I seem altogether wrong." Yes, but if you believe in Christ, though you were still more wrong—that is to say, though you were dead, which is the wrongest state in which a man's body can be,—though you were dead yet shall you live. You look at the spiritual thermometer, and you say, "How low will the grace of God go? will it descend to summer heat? will it touch the freezing point? will it go to zero?" Yes, it will go below the lowest conceivable point,—lower than any instrument can indicate: it will go below the zero of death. If you believe in Jesus, though you are not only wrong, but dead, yet shall you live.

But, says another, "I feel so weak. I cannot understand, I cannot lay hold of things; I cannot pray. I cannot do anything. All I can do is feebly to trust in Jesus." All right! Though you had gone further than that, and were so weak as to be dead, yet should you live. Though the weakness had turned to a dire paralysis, that left you altogether without strength, yet it is written, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "Oh, Sir," says one, "I am so unfeeling." Mark

you, these generally are the most feeling people in the world. "I am sorry every day because I cannot be sorry for my sin"—that is the way they talk; it is very absurd, but still very real to them. "Oh," cries one, "the earth shook, the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the very dead came out of their graves at the death of Christ.

> "'Of feeling all things show some sign
> But this unfeeling heart of mine.'"

Yet if thou believest, unfeeling as thou art, thou livest; for if thou wert gone further than numbness to deadness, yet if thou believest in him thou shalt live.

But the poor creature fetches a sigh, and cries, "Sir, it is not only that I have no feeling, but I am become objectionable and obnoxious to everybody. I am a weariness to myself and to others. I am sure when I come to tell you my troubles you must wish me at Jericho, or somewhere else far away." Now, I admit that such a thought *has* occurred to us sometimes when we have been very busy, and some poor soul has grown prosy with rehearsing his seven-times-repeated miseries; but if you were to get more wearisome still, if you were to become so bad that people would as soon see a corpse as see you, yet remember Jesus says, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Ay, if you went so far as to go in and out among men like an unquiet ghost, so that everybody got out of your way, it would not put you beyond the promise, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

"Oh, sir, I have no hope; my case is quite hopeless!" Very well; but if you had got beyond that, so that you were dead, and could not even know you had no hope,

yet if you believed in him you should live. "Oh, but I have tried everything, and there is nothing more for me to attempt. I have read books, spoken to Christians, and I am nothing bettered." No doubt it is quite so; but if you had even passed beyond that stage, so that you could not try anything more, yet if you did believe in Jesus you should live. Oh, the blessed power of faith! Nay, rather say the matchless power of him who is the resurrection and the life; for though the poor believer were dead, yet shall he live! Glory be to the Lord who works so wonderfully.

To conclude, if you once do believe in Christ, and come to live, there is this sweet reflection for you, "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" Our Arminian friends say that you may be a child of God to-day and a child of the devil to-morrow. Write out that statement, and place at the bottom of it the name "*Arminius*," and then put the scrap of paper into the fire; it is the best thing you can do with it, for there is no truth in it. Jesus says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Here is a very literal translation—"And every one who lives and believes on me, in no wise shall die forever." This is from "The Englishman's Greek New Testament," and nothing can be better. The believer may pass through the natural change called death, as far as his body is concerned; but as for his soul it cannot die, for it is written, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." These are not "ifs" and "buts," and faint hopes; but they are dead certainties, nay, living

certainties, out of the mouth of the living Lord himself. You get the life of God in your soul, and you shall never die. "Do you mean that I may do as I like, and live in sin?" No, man, I mean nothing of the sort; what right have you to impute such teaching as that to me? I mean that you shall not love sin and live in it, for that is death; but you shall live unto God. Your likes shall be so radically changed that you shall abhor evil all your days, and long to be holy as God is holy; and you shall be kept from transgression, and shall not go back to wallow in sin. If in some evil hour you backslide, yet shall you be restored; and the main current of your life shall be from the hour of your regeneration towards God, and holiness, and heaven. The angels that rejoiced over you when you repented made no mistake; they shall go on to rejoice till they welcome you amidst the everlasting songs of the blessed at the right hand of God. Believest thou this? Come, poor soul, believest thou this? Who are you? That does not matter, you can get into the "whosoever." That ark will hold all God's Noahs. What have you done? One said to me the other day, "I should like to tell you some of my sins I answered quickly, "I would like you would not; I have enough of my own without being infected with yours." What is any man that he should have the filth of another man's drains poured into his ear? No, no: confess to God, but not to man unless you have wronged him, and confession of the wrong is due to him.

"Ah," saith one, "you don't know what I am." No, and I don't want to know what you are; but if you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere about you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust the Lord

Jesus Christ, for he is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon him, and he will carry you in his bosom. Cast your whole weight upon his atonement; it will bear the strain. Hang on him as the vessel hangs on the nail, and seek no other support. Depend upon Christ with all your might just as you now are, and as the Lord liveth you shall live, and as Christ reigneth you shall reign over sin, and as Christ cometh to glory you shall partake of that glory for ever and ever. Amen.

X.

HEAVEN BELOW.

September 21, 1884.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."—REVELATIONS vii. 16, 17.

LET us think of this felicity, that we may be comforted in the prospect of it. All this is already enjoyed by tens of thousands of the redeemed. Some of those who were very dear to us on earth, whose faith we desire to follow, are now for ever with the Lord, and this is their joyful portion—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Our comfort lies in the sweet reflection that we are journeying to this goodly land. This divine inheritance is ours: we have the seal of the Holy Spirit upon our title-deeds; we have tasted of the grapes of its Eschol; we already rejoice in the light and warmth of its celestial city to which we draw near. In a little time we shall be actually within the gate of pearl, and shall know in an instant infinitely more of its glory than an apostle could teach us here below. We are like to one who hath in his hand the guide-book of a country to which he is journeying; he finds in it fair pictures of the scenery of the land and the architecture of the cities, and as he reads each page he says to himself, "I am going there! This is what I shall soon behold!" It

would be a wretched thing to have such a book in one's hand and to be entering upon a life-long banishment from home and the home-country. Then should we have to say, "This was my country once, but I shall never see it again. Fair are its skies and lovely are its vales, but mine eye shall ache in vain to gaze upon them. I am exiled for ever from my own dear land!" It is not so with us who are believers in Christ: our faces are towards Immanuel's land, the land which floweth with milk and honey, and we have a portion among the blessed; a mansion is being made ready for each one of us, and we have this promise: "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Rejoice, then, beloved, for if your portion on earth be slender, if your condition here be sorrowful, if your trials multiply, if your strength declines, yet it is but a little while and he that will come shall come, and shall not tarry. Well doth our hymn tell us that—

"An hour with our Lord will make up for it all."

We shall forget the pains of a long life in one half-hour of the vision of the Well-beloved. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Look before you. It is brightness beyond though it be darkness here. Anticipate your sure reward, it cometh with all speed. I speak but sober truth; it seems but a day's journey from this spot to the heavenly highlands. It is so little a while since I was a boy, and yet in less space I shall be with God. It seems but a few days to you who are aged people since you climbed your mother's knee, and yet in far less time you will behold the face of your soul's Bridegroom. Then all trouble will be ended, and eternal joy will crown your head.

But I want you to do this morning, and by God's grace I think we shall accomplish it, a little more than receive comfort. I long that we may "sit together in the heavenlies" even now. It seems to me that this world, if Christians lived as they should do, would become a nether heaven. The true Christian life, when we live near to God, is the rough draft of the life of full communion above. We have seen the artist make with his pencil, or with his charcoal, a bare outline of his picture. It is nothing more, but still one could guess what the finished picture will be from the sketch before you. One acquainted with the artist could see upon the canvas all the splendor of color peeping through the dark lines of the pencil. Now, I want you to-day to see "the patterns of things in the heavens." We have much of heaven here; at any rate, we have the Lamb who is the glory of the eternal city; we have the presence of him that sits upon the throne among us even now; we have if not the perfect holiness of heaven, yet a justification quite as complete as that of the glorified; we have the "white robes," for "the blood of the Lamb" has washed them even now; and if we have not yet the palm branches of final victory, yet thanks be to God, we are led in triumph in every place, and even now "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Therefore—

> "I would begin the music here,
> And so my soul should rise;
> Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear
> My passions to the skies."

Our voices are not clear as yet, they are half-choked with the fogs and smoke of earth. They will be perfectly attuned ere long; at any rate, let us go over the notes,

and if we cannot reach to the full melody of the heavenly music, yet let us run up and down the scale, and try some easy passages. Come, let us worship, and adore, and rejoice as our departed ones are doing, and thus enjoy some of "the days of heaven upon the earth." That shall be my drift this morning, as the Holy Spirit shall instruct me.

I. Keeping to the text, however, I want to speak, first, of THE PERFECTION OF THE PROVISION which is enjoyed in heaven—"They shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." This is the perfection of the provision.

I must, by your permission, go a little further back to make my description of this provision more complete. Notice the last sentence of the fifteenth verse: "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." In the reading we interpreted according to the Revised Version, which gives a more correct rendering: "He that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them." The glorified dwell under the shadow of God. It is for this reason that "the sun shall not light on them, nor any heat," because *they dwell in God.* Oh, what a dwelling-place that will be! You and I are often like Noah's dove, sent out flying over a weary waste, and finding no rest to the sole of our foot; but they dwell in the ark for ever. We go in and out and find pasture, but in that going in and out we are sometimes troubled; up yonder they "go no more out for ever," but eternally behold the face of the King, and for ever dwell at God's right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore. Oh what a joy this must be in heaven, to be always within the circle of the eternal presence, which is always seen, always unclouded, always enjoyed! Such a dwelling means transformation, for none can dwell with God but

those who are like him, free from sin, and perfect in holiness. We cannot abide in God for ever unless we are like him, and this in itself is boundless bliss. The abiding in the outspread pavilion of Jehovah will certify a similarity of sanctity and purity between the redeemed and the great Father who becomes their dwelling-place. The Lord shall tabernacle over his glorified people: he shall be their eternal home.

Next we are assured that they have *all their necessities prevented.* "They shall hunger no more." To be supplied when we hunger is the mercy of earth; never to hunger at all is the plenitude of heaven. God shall so fill the souls of his redeemed that they shall have no longings; their longings shall be prevented by their constant satisfaction. That which they enjoy will be more than they ever desired to enjoy, or ever imagined that they could be capable of enjoying. Imagination's utmost height never reached to the exceeding bliss and glory of the world to come. The saints confess in the glory that it never entered into their hearts to guess what God had prepared for them that love him. Heaven shall exceed all the desires of God's people; they shall not, even with their enlarged capacities, be able to wish for anything which they do not already possess; so that they shall hunger no more, in the sense that they shall never pant for more than they have.

They shall have done with the desires which it is right for them to have here—desires which intimate their present imperfection. Here it is their duty and their privilege to long after perfection, to be sighing and crying for a perfect deliverance from every shade of sin; but they shall not sigh and cry for this in glory, for they shall be without fault before the throne of God. None of them shall cry, "O wretched man that I am!

who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This on earth is one of the most deeply spiritual of cries, never heard from any but those whose sanctification is greatly advanced. None will ever utter that bitter exclamation but men like Paul, to whom the slightest speck of sin has a horror about it akin to death itself. Fanatical persons talk about being perfect; it is the talk of blind men: but those whose eyes have seen the Lord abhor themselves, and sigh and cry over what other men call failures, and mistakes, and infirmities. To them their heart sins and unseen faults are things to weep over; they have sharp hungerings and piercing thirsts after complete likeness to Christ. This likeness the saints possess before the throne; and they shall not thirst any more, even after this best and most desirable of attainments, since they shall enjoy it to the full.

Beloved, observe that, as they have no kind of hunger, so they have also no measure of thirst; that is to say, they have no needs, no unsatisfied wishes of any sort. In whatever form a need might approach them, it is excluded, for both hunger and thirst are shut out. Oh, brothers, it has been blessed to hunger and thirst after righteousness, what must that higher blessedness be which rises above even these holy desires!

We have wishes here which ought not to be gratified; these occasion us our sharpest pangs of hunger; but there they shall never know an unlawful wish, a wandering desire, or even an unwise longing. They shall have all things that a renewed heart can enjoy. All that their perfected nature can yearn after they shall possess: there shall be no unsatisfied craving of their manhood, neither their risen body nor their sanctified spirit shall be moved to hunger or thirst after any evil, for there shall be nothing about them which has a

tendency that way. The provision made for them shall be so absolutely complete that before they can desire any good thing they shall find it; before they know a need they shall have enjoyed the supply. This is wonderful! Yes, but all I can tell you is not the half of the truth.

Further, as we read we discover a third blessing, namely, that *every overpowering influence is attempered;*—"Neither shall the sun light on them." What if by that "sun" is meant the full glory of God! If you and I could be introduced into the divine presence at once and as we are, the first result upon us must be a swoon, and the second must be death. We are not able to endure the blaze of Deity as yet; its glory would cause a sunstroke to the soul. We might well cry with good Mr. Walsh, "Hold, Lord! Hold! Remember I am but an earthern vessel, and I cannot as yet hold much of thee." We are not prepared to endure the Lord as our Sun, in meridian splendor. In heaven they are able to endure the immediate presence of God, not only because of the Mediatorship of Christ, through whom the glory of God shines with tempered splendor upon the saints, but also because they themselves are strengthened. From all this earthly grossness quit, they are enabled to stand in that light to which no mortal man can now approach. To us even "our God is a consuming fire" while we are here; but in the saints there remaineth nothing to consume. The light of God is not too bright for eyes that Christ hath touched with heaven's own eyesalve. The vision of the Infinite is not too glorious for those whom the Lord has prepared to be with him and to see his face. What John of Patmos could not bear, the weakest saint in heaven can endure, not for an hour, but for the whole stretch of eternity. Blessed, indeed,

are they who shall behold the King in the ivory palaces above!

When it is added "Nor any heat," we learn that *injurious influences shall cease to operate* By our surroundings here we are troubled with many heats. The very comforts of life, like warm weather, tend to dry us up. A man may have gold, a man may have health, a man may have prosperity and honor till he is withered like the heath in the desert in the day of drought. Unless a dew from the Lord shall rest upon the branch of the prosperous he will be parched indeed. We have need of grace whenever God gives us blessings of a temporal kind. But no heat of that sort shall happen to the saints in heaven: they can be rich, and honored, and perfectly beautiful, and yet under no temptation to self-exaltation. Here the heats which are around us tend to fever us. Our fellow-men grow hot about this and that—the pursuit of wealth, the triumph of party politics, the honor of a family, and so forth; and we are all too apt to feel the common ague. Within ourselves, heats arise: unhealthy and unholy heats. We cannot go through this plague-smitten world altogether unscathed; every now and then we return to our quiet chamber, and feel that we have sickened, sickened in the company wherein we have tarried for an hour, sickened even in contact with those whom we sought to bless. Up yonder no fever shall burn the hearts of the glorified. Travelling through the wilderness of this world, on a sudden the hot sirocco of worldliness sweeps over us, laden with the burning dust of the desert, bearing death beneath its wings; God only can keep us in that evil hour; only as we lie on our faces before him can we hope to outlive the blast. Many are the temptations of this life; some of them soft and deceptive, others fierce and terrible; but up yonder no

sirocco shall ever blow, and the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick."

See, then, the perfect provision which is made by Christ for his saints above, and listen while we try to show that this same provision, in a modified way, lies to our hand even now. Come, beloved, do we not dwell in God? Do we not sing, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations"? If any of you believers have wandered away from your resting-place, whose fault is that? Has not the Lord given you himself to be your perpetual pavilion? Has not Jesus said, "Abide in me"? Have you not sung in that sweet twenty-third Psalm, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever"? What more do you want? The Lord hath spread his tabernacle over you; you abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Whenever you dwell in God and the Lamb feeds you, do you not also realize that next expression, "they shall hunger no more"? Can you not sing when Christ is with you and you dwell in God—

> "I thirst, but not as once I did,
> The vain delights of earth to share;
> Thy wounds, Immanuel, all forbid
> That I should seek my pleasures there.
>
> "It was the sight of thy dear cross
> First wean'd my soul from earthly things:
> And taught me to esteem as dross
> The mirth of fools and pomp of kings."

A child of God in communion with Christ would not lift his finger to possess a world, nor wink his eye to see all the pomp of kings, nor move a step to enjoy all the honors of rank, nor rise from sitting at Jesus' feet to learn all the wisdom of philosophy. He is already filled; what can he have more? The best of the best has fallen

to his portion, and shall he change it? No; like the olive tree, he saith, "Should I leave my fatness, and go to be promoted over the trees?" and with the fig, he cries, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and go to be promoted over the trees?" He that eateth of the bread which Jesus gives him shall never hunger more after a painful sort. The husks of carnal joy have no attractions to the son who banquets at his father's table.

"Neither shall they thirst any more;" they shall feel that the Lord Jesus is such an all-satisfying, all-sufficient portion that their desires can go no further. I have sped across the sea with flying sails, bidding each gale waft me according to its will, hoping that I might somewhere find a port. Restlessly have I hastened to and fro, and been tossed up and down, the sport of every wave. My spirit has sped on and on through fair and foul, never abiding long in one stay. Happily there came a day when I found a fair haven. Down went my anchor; it took fast hold and held my barque. Under the lee of Calvary I found rest. Now blow ye winds, or cease to blow as all shall best please you. I stir not out to sea again. In the fair haven of the love of God in Christ Jesus shall my spirit abide for ever. If we could but reach this resolve, dear brethren, and hold to it, we should have no more anxieties and longings; we also should hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

And then how blessedly true it is to those who dwell in God and live near to Jesus that now the sun doth not light on them. God in his infinite majesty and holiness does not overwhelm us.

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.

"But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His love forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins."

What a blessing it is to see God in Christ, and to rejoice in him.

And, now, beloved, if you are being daily fed by Jesus and are dwelling in God, the light of the sun, as to temporal prosperity, will do you no harm. You may be rich, but you will not trust in uncertain riches; you may be famous, but you will be as humble as if you were obscure; you may be learned, but you will sit at Jesus' feet; you may be indulged with all kinds of worldly prosperity, and yet these things will not prove a snare unto you. "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

Those who dwell in God are not now parched with inward heat. We notice people of God who are anxious and fretful, and cause a great deal of misery for people round about them by always worrying, fidgeting, and being in a state of nervous excitement. But holy souls, who abide in Christ, take everything calmly. You can remember such persons, both men and women;—whatever happened they remained unmoved, patient and cheerful. Great losses came in the course of business, but the brother did not lose his balance; sad bereavements came, but the sister did not repine. If the believer endured a sharp affliction, his chief concern was that the Lord would sanctify it to him: if people persecuted or slandered him he was not surprised, for he expected to be hated of the world when he became a follower of Jesus. If he prospered, he did not get into a heat of pride, and begin to crow over everybody else like a cock on his dunghill. In patience he possessed his soul.

God's good gift of the Holy Spirit comforted and strengthened him. He could say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." How much of mischief comes to the human body through its heats! The doctor looks hopeful when our blood grows cool again and the fever ceases. The best cure for the fever of the soul is to be made to dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, and to be fed by the Lord Jesus Christ; for that sacred shadow, and that health-giving food, prevent the burning sickness from coming near the chosen of the Lord. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Safe, calm, happy, restful shalt thou be: thy soul shall dwell at ease, and with the meek thou shalt inherit the earth.

"Ah," says somebody, "you are setting us up an exceedingly high standard." I am setting up a standard to which multitudes of God's people have attained, to which I would have you all attain. If this blessed bribe of heaven below does not make you ambitious to rise to this level, what more shall I say? It is for your own profit and for God's glory that you should not rest content short of this. Rise from the dust, my brethren. Ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place. Abide in Christ, and feed upon Christ, and then all this shall be yours to-day and throughout life. So much for the perfection of the provision.

II. Now will you give me your heart's attention while

I touch a noble string, and that is, THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." You see this is the reason for all the provision and enjoyment: the verse begins with the word "For," signifying that this is the cause of all the felicity of the blessed, that the Lamb doth feed and lead them.

Who is this that feeds them? It is *the Lamb.* I wish it were possible for me to communicate to you the enjoyment my own soul has had in meditating upon this blessed word "The Lamb," as it stands in this connection. Does it not teach us, first, that our comfort and life must come from *our incarnate Saviour*—the Lamb? The expression is very peculiar: it is a figure, and no figure; a mixed metaphor, and yet most plain and clear! It is written, "The Lamb shall shepherd them." This is an accurate interpretation. How is that? A shepherd, and that shepherd a Lamb! Here is the truth which the words contain,—he that saves is a man like ourselves. He that provides for his people is himself one of them,—"For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." A lamb is a member of the flock; but in this case the Lamb is the shepherd of the flock: a shepherd who is also a lamb must be the most tender shepherd conceivable, the most sympathetic and brotherly guardian that can be. When a man is shepherd to sheep he should be compassionate, but he cannot be so tender as if he actually partook of their nature. In our case our shepherd is to the full a partaker of our nature: we are men, and our shepherd is a man.

Beloved, our soul's support, our spiritual meat, lies in this, that the Son of God is a partaker of flesh and blood, and is one of ourselves. He that sits upon the throne

is our kinsman, a sharer in our nature, a brother born of adversity—why, surely this heavenly truth is manna from heaven, the food of saintly souls. The Lamb is their hope, their comfort, their honor, their delight, their glory.

Does it not mean more than that? "the Lamb" surely refers to *sacrifice*. Only run your eye back a verse or two, and you have the key of the expression, "they that washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." He, then, that feeds his people in heaven is the sacrifice, the atonement, the expiation. In heaven they glory in the cross. Each one sings "he loved me and gave himself for me." The glorified drink the deepest draughts of delight from the fact that God was made flesh, and that in human flesh he offered perfect expiation for human guilt. Brethren, these two fountains are here as well as there: come, let us drink of them; let us prevent our thirst by the water of the well of Bethlehem, and by streams from the smitten rock.

Still, there is a third meaning which must not be overlooked. "The Lamb" must refer to *the meekness of character*, the lowliness and condescension of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ on earth was "led as a lamb to the slaughter." He was "meek and lowly in heart." He walked up and down among men, the friend of sinners, the lover of little children, the companion of the poor, and to-day he is not otherwise than he was on the earth. Though heaven adores him, he is still as compassionate and condescending as he was in the days of his flesh, and this is why he can feed his people so well both here and in heaven.

I beg you to dwell upon that word "Lamb" till you feed upon it with your whole souls. Jesus has joined himself to his flock: "As the children are partakers of

flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." As surely as he is God he is also man, indeed and of a truth; not in semblance, but in reality.

"It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,
And will for ever be,
To muse upon the gracious truth
Of thy humanity.

"Oh, joy! there sitteth in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!

"For ever God, for ever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fixed on him, my hope remains
Eternally secure."

He is also our sacrifice: "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." What rest came unto our hearts when we first understood the meaning of that word—"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"! Continue to behold him, and all your feverish heats will be abated, and your hunger and thirst of spirit will be gone.

Jesus is so meek and lowly, as I have said, that you may approach to him at all times, and he will manifest himself to you. He is tender and gentle, and never makes himself strange unto his own flesh. Sitting at his feet you shall find rest unto your soul. "Neither shall the sun light on you, nor any heat."

The character of our Lord, then, brings our spirit all that it needs; but yet this is not all; the text speaks of "*the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne*" as feeding them. Think of that, the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Can you put these two things together, a sac-

rifice and a throne? That same Saviour who opened his veins that he might cleanse us from sin now wears the imperial purple of the universe. He that stooped to be made sin for us is now supreme sovereign, King of kings and Lord of lords. Think of that and be comforted. Our Representative is glorified. Our covenant Head, our second Adam, is in the midst of the throne. God the Father hath exalted the Mediator to the place of power and honor and rule. Our Saviour hath all power in heaven and in earth. Sometimes when I think of my great King and Captain exalted to so glorious an estate, I feel that it matters nothing what becomes of me, his poor follower. The sun of persecution smites not when he is seen as God over all blessed forever. Hunger is not hunger, and pain is not pain, for such a loved one. In blissful sympathy with the unutterable delights of Jesus, we are happy at our worst, feeling that if Christ be rich we are not poor, and if Christ be happy we are not disappointed. His victory is our victory. His glory is our glory. Feel this union with your enthroned Lord, and you will begin to be in heaven.

Yet further remember that when we read of "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne," it must mean that our Redeemer is the most conspicuous of persons. In the forefront of the throne is Jesus. He is seen of angels; he is beheld continually with wonder by all the servants of our God. The sovereignty of God, his royal power, his eternal majesty are at the back of Christ to sustain his cause and make his name illustrious. He must reign. Every eye must see him, every knee must bow to him, and every tongue must call him Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He shall have all enemies under his feet, and shall be extolled, and exalted, and be very high. My heart rejoices to remember this fact

in this cloudy and dark day. Though our modern thinkers sneer at the gospel, and sceptics scoff at the doctrine of the Nazarene, and all manner of scorn is poured upon our holy faith, yet the Lord hath set his Son upon his holy hill, and he is there with him to secure his everlasting dominion, despite the assaults of men and devils.

In all this I see the choicest food for the flock of God. To them Jesus speaks from the throne, and uses to-day words like those which he spoke on earth. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Out of the glory he saith, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

The "midst of the throne" seems to signify also that Jesus has become the very centre of all things. "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be." He is lifted up, and all men are drawn to him. He is the great central sun, and all other lights revolve about him. He is the heart of the eternal purpose, the hinge of history, and the climax of revelation. He reigns in the midst of heaven, even as at this day upon earth he is in the midst of two or three who are met together in his name. Our joy is like that of the just made perfect. In this delight we unite with the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Jesus on the throne is to our hearts and songs the central person, and the centre shall never be removed, neither shall the gathering of his people be scattered.

Thus you see who it is that feeds the saints in heaven, and I desire you to feel that if you are to be fed and comforted here below, it must be by the same great Shepherd of the sheep, in the same character. There are no stores for you other than those which are in the

hands of Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells; there are no comforts for you except as they are given from the throne where the Lamb is reigning. Turn ye away, my brethren, turn ye away from all the frothy novelties of modern thought, and the vain inventions of man, and behold the crown of your adorable Lord, the Lamb of God's Passover, the Lamb who shall overcome all the powers of evil and stand in the midst of the throne. Dwell on the literal, historical incarnation of the Son of God; believe in his literal death, in his actual substitution, his complete and perfect atonement; dwell on his rising from the dead, and his ascent to the right hand of God, and never doubt it that he is now the supreme object of heaven's adoration, the Lord of all things that are or shall be, sure and certain to be in the latter days exalted above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named. If we can but live on these truths, and delight ourselves in them, we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat, but even here we shall find living fountains of water, and tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

III. I finish by giving a hint or two only upon the third point; that is to say, THE MANNER OF THIS PROVIDING. We have considered the provision in its perfection, and the Provider in his glorious character, now let us see how this provision is given to the saints, for in the same manner is it brought to us.

In two ways the saints in heaven enjoy it,—the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them. Go over this, and think first of *the feeding* of them. The Greek word is "shall shepherdize them." In heaven Jesus is a shepherd ruling over all his flock with a happy, genial, sympathetic sovereignty,

to which they yield prompt and glad obedience. There the Lord Jesus cares for his people immediately and personally. He himself bestows upon them all that they require. Here he has under-shepherds, and he hands out the food by our poor instrumentality; and, alas, sometimes we are found incapable, or forgetful, and the flock is not fed; but it is never so in heaven, for the Lamb himself maintains the pastorate, and acts the shepherd in a manner which none of us can emulate. What saith the prophet Micah? "And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

All else of care and feeding that saints can require in glory is in Christ. I know not what it may be, but this I know, that while they worship him he cares for them. He is among them as the Chief Shepherd, at whose appearing the under-shepherds shall appear with him in glory.

Up yonder Jesus still communes with them very closely, else were it not written, "The Lamb shall feed them." I remind you again of what we have said: he feeds them, therefore he is their Shepherd; yet still it is the Lamb that feeds them, therefore he is one with them; as if he fed with them, as if their food was his food, and his food their food, and they were one with him in all respects. But what must fellowship with Christ be in heaven! I do protest I have sometimes had; and many of you have had, such communion with Jesus here that, if I could but have continued to enjoy it, it would not have concerned me the turning of a penny whether I were here or among the angels, for it was bliss enough for me to be with Jesus. But, oh! when we shall have enlarged our capacities, when our understanding shall

have been cleared, and our affections purified, and all our manhood shall be made innocent and Christlike, what must it be then to behold his glory, to commune with himself, to lean our head upon his bosom, to bask in his love, and to feel our hearts on fire with love in return! Oh to be with him for ever, to see no intervening cloud, to feel no wandering wish, no thought of future declension, no possibility of grieving him by sin! What must it be to be for ever one with him in his glory! That is bliss above conception. He shepherdizes them, he himself does it, and therefore they are supremely blessed. Now do you not think we can enjoy some of this to-day? Do you question it? What does the tenth of John mean, if Jesus is not the good Shepherd of his sheep at this day? Read it through when you get home. What does the twenty-third Psalm mean? Is that a psalm for another world, or for this? Does it not say, "The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures: he *leadeth* me beside the still waters"? Why, one would think from the look of your doubtful face that it ran thus—"The Lord has forgotten to be my shepherd. He has given me over to the wolf. He has driven me into a wilderness, and left me among the dark mountains. I perish in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." It is not so; we must not think it so, for even here our great Lord is our Shepherd, and he careth for each one of the flock.

Then it is added, "*He shall lead.*" That is another work of the Shepherd, to lead his flock,—"He leads them to living fountains of waters." You may read it, "he shall guide them to fountains of waters of life"; it is but a variation of the same thought. Now, even in heaven the holy ones need guiding, and Jesus leads the

way. While he is guiding, he points out to his people the secret founts and fresh springs which as yet they have not tasted. As eternity goes on, I have no doubt that the Saviour will be indicating fresh delights to his redeemed. "Come hither," saith he to his flock, "here are yet more flowing streams." He will lead them on and on, by the century, aye, by the chiliad, from glory unto glory, onward and upward in growing knowledge and enjoyment. Continually will he conduct his flock to deeper mysteries and higher glories. Never will the inexhaustible God who has given himself to be the portion of his people ever be fully known, so that there will eternally be sources of freshness and new delight, and the Shepherd will continue to lead his flock to these living fountains of water. He will guide them,

> "'From glory unto glory' that ever lies before,
> Still widening, adoring, rejoicing more and more,
> Still following where he leadeth, from shining field to field,
> Himself our goal of glory, Revealer and Revealed!"

He will also cause them to drink of the river of his pleasures, so that they shall be full of bliss. Can we not grasp a little of this to-day? If we will but follow Christ we may drink of the water which he freely gives to all who believe in him, even as he gave to the woman of Samaria. "I cannot see any joy," cries one. No; but Jesus will lead you to it. "Oh, but I read my Bible this morning, and I did not get anything from it." That may be; but if Jesus had been there and led you to the fountain, you would have been refreshed. How the texts open up when Jesus touches them! You are like Hagar; you have laid your child down among the shrubs to die; you are perishing of thirst, and yet if you would but listen you might hear the plash of the falling

waters just behind you. You only need the Lord to speak and open your eyes and you will see rich supplies, for the living fountain is near at hand. Go you to the Saviour to-day, and say, "Lord, lead me to living fountains of water. I drank years ago, and I have been drinking all along, but Lord I want deeper draughts. I desire to know more and love more." Jesus will lead you. He will do it *now*, and when he does so you will realise to the full how like this earth may be to heaven above. Let us commit ourselves like sheep to our great Shepherd. Come, ye wanderers, return to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. You that have been in him these many years and fed in his pastures, come near to him and follow him yet more closely, and your eyes shall be opened to see new rivers of delight where all seemed dry. You shall find in the valley of Baca a well, and drinking of it you shall go from strength to strength, till every one of you in Zion appeareth before God. How long will it be, O ever-blessed One, till we behold thee? Even now the day breaketh!

XI.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP.

September 28, 1884.

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—LUKE xv. 4–7.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindliness towards them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its centre. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, "He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God's free people; and the fallen women of the towns, and such-like riffraff make up his audiences; and he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats

with them. Did he not go into the house of Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?" We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could, because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself; not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he was seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he was seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there "drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves: for he said, "What man *of you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, till he find it?" No argument tells more powerfully upon men than one which comes close home to their own daily life, and the Saviour put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel; for it was the soul of man which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion,—"If you men would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track

until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?" The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he find it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race: if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and the great Father above; but he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were; "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord's answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves: for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

I. In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a man lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.

The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-nine. He counts them

again, and he notices that a certain one has gone: it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot: he knows all about it, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind's eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety-and-nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: "a sheep is lost!" This agitates his mind more and more—"a sheep is lost." It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is a sheep, and therefore utterly *defenceless* now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question—"What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself!" A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again —"A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death.' A sheep is of all creatures the most *senseless*. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master's stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul—"A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn,

it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand." A sheep is *shiftless;* it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can espy its food from an enormous distance; but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then, and said, "Good sir, what aileth you? you seem in great concern"; he would have replied, "And well I may be, for a sheep is lost." "It is only one, sir; and I see you have ninety-nine left." "Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost."

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition—"if he lose one of them"?

I think it is, first, because of *his property in it.* The parable does not so much speak of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not the sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk—it may be so used if you please—but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep; as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money; and the third, not concerning the prodigal youth,

but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost: yea, they were all once in the same condition; for "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save: these are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it—his even when they wander; and when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in John xvii.: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us; he says: "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is nearly nineteen centuries ago since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own; and we shall be his, for that purchase-money was not paid in vain. And so the Saviour looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect unto himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This

thought, therefore, presses upon him, "One of my sheep is lost." It is a wonderful supposition, that which is contained in this parable—"if he lose one of them." What! lose one whom he loved or ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost for ever: that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word—"if he lose one of them" sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people: it is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changeth not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father hath given them to him: this it is which in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact,—One of my sheep is lost.

Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, *his great compassion* for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgetteth his sheep: he must save his flock, and he is straitened till it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He

knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time; and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long; and so the sympathetic Saviour grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons, when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police-station, and calls at every likely house, for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted till she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge, when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he hath no rest in his spirit till his beloved is found. He hath compassion like a God, and that doth transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers,—the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord—"if he lose one of them."

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost,—*he was a shepherd to it.* It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd; and he says to himself, "If I lose one of them my shepherd-work will be ill-done." What dishonor it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shep-

herd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having preserved them all. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." The devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain: but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent; and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. "If he lose one of them," says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the Shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, "He hath lost one of them." Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, "He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves." Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, "He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must needs let him perish." This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, "What will the Egyptians say?" It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord's heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the

shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you to-day, and should fail to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

II. Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is *a definite search.* The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the Shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon; or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost,—a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbors,—for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preach-

ing in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all: but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark: into the very centre of the heart the word finds its way; for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He saith, "Mary," and the response is, "Rabboni." I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not till he found it; and so doth the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty: he does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at Blindman's-buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is *an all-absorbing search.* He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they *are* left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place; but that is not intended: it simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie: he leaves them well provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. "Shepherd, the way is very rocky!" He does not seem to know what the way is, his heart is with his lost sheep. "Shepherd, it is a heavy climb up yon mountain side." He does not note his toil; his

excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. "Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley." It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is *an active search* too; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he find it; and he does this with *a personal search.* He does not say to one of his underlings, "Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home." No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice *the perseverance of the search:* "until he find it." He does not stop till he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own

lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly doth he see, and so effectually doth he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and *a successful search*, until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed,—he does not appear to put it back into the fold again: I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately; but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend towards the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pull-backs with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties; but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner; and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and manhood of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

III. Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears,—

"When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep; in his life he continued to seek it; in his death he laid it upon his shoulders; in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord's career is a course of soul-winning, a life laid out for his people; and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he layeth it on his shoulders. It is *an uplifting action*, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he hath strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was, without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from the horrible pit? when he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings;" but it is a dearer emblem still to be borne upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was *an appropriating act.* He seemed to say, "You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders." He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for a man does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs, so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, "I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary

desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it." Here are our Lord's own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said unto you, "Thou art mine?" Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing—

> "So I my best Beloved's am,
> And he is mine."

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was *a deed of service* to the sheep. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labors. "I am among you as he that serveth," said our Lord long ago. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and he hath laid us on him, too, and he beareth us. Remember that choice Scripture: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a *rest-giving* act, very likely *needful* to the sheep

which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd's shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are borne along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The Christ upbears us to-day; we have no need of strength: our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you"? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin: the shepherd's feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy: "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place." Blessed rest of faith to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden; he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seemeth to bear no burden but that of his people. He layeth out his omnipotence to save his chosen; having redeemed them first with the price of blood, he redeems them still with all his power. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Oh the glorious grace of our unfailing Saviour, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

IV. We close by noticing one more matter, which is —THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep

is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centered upon it, so he now finds all his joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." "That is a great load for you, shepherd!" Joyfully he answers, "I am glad to have it on my shoulders." The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, "This is a heavy load." No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. "He layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing.*" Remember that text: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, "I have taken them up upon my shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid on me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, my Father's righteous ire." His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of

triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking of his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she *must* go and nurse him; she is wretched till she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was forever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; but yet he must needs come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted

by his friends and neighbors. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns round to friends and neighbors and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbors. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each one of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no

repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we should not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and me who have long ago repented —who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women—we do not give so much joy to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns unto God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of *the joy* which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have "high days and holy days" and "bonfire nights."

There are special circumstances about repentance and

conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep, that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, "There is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad." You remember that good men made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus; and you heartily unite with them in welcoming new-comers. You will not act the elder brother, and say I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; but you will enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your heaven to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back

his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love towards him, who gave all his heart to work our redemption. Let us love him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure; but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our heart and soul. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all *his* heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner, here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? Will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him, and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him,—"Come, Lord, I wait for thy salvation! Save me, for I trust in thee." If thou dost thus pray, thou hast the mark upon thee of Christ's sheep, for he saith, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him for he looks to you.

XII.

THOUGHT-READING EXTRAORDINARY.

October 5, 1884.

"Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."—Psalm x. 17.

Notice at the outset the logic of this verse. It is very simple, very forcible, very accurate logic. It runs thus: "Thou hast," "thou wilt." "Lord, *thou hast* heard the desire of the humble: *thou wilt* prepare their heart." When you know that the Lord God is immutable, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," you may conclude without mistake that what he has done he is prepared to do again. The argument from the past to the future would be a sorry one if you were dealing with fallible man; for what man has done is no sure guarantee of what he may do; he is such a creature of freaks and whims: but when you have to deal with the Eternal God, who is faithful and true, and changes not, you may reckon with safety that the thing which has been is the thing which shall be. Well did the apostle say, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

On looking at the text again you will see that the same blessed logic is carried a step further; for you read, "Thou wilt," and then again, "thou wilt": "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Faith first of all concludes that God will bless because of former blessings, and then she is so sure of her conclu-

sion that upon it she is prepared to build up a further confidence. This is a noble faith, worthy of imitation; but it is by no means common;—not a hundredth part so common as it ought to be. To doubtful minds it is difficult even to infer the future from a present fact immediately before their eye; but to the believing heart it is an easy thing to do something more than that, namely, to draw an inference of hope from a former inference of hope. Faith builds a sure abode with invisible stones. She expects because she has experienced, and experiences already what she expects. Why not? Is not faith the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen? Since that which we believe is sure, it is worthy to be the foundation of further faith. We are very fond of that verse—

> "And a 'new song' is in my mouth,
> To long-loved music set;
> Glory to thee for all the grace
> I have not tasted yet."

By such language we praise God for mercy not yet received; and our text suggests another practical use of "things not seen as yet," namely, to make them, as apprehended by our faith, the basis of a still higher confidence in God. This is to be built up on our most holy faith. Rest assured that this is not constructing castles in the air; for our faith is no delusion, but is made of solid, substantial stuff, before which even the supposed infallibilities of science are trifles light as air. Because our Good Shepherd has made us to lie down in green pastures, we argue that there is no cause for fear though we walk through the valley of death-shade, and from that we surely gather that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Such reasoning is as

accurate as the demonstrations of geometry. The Lord will never leave us to be ashamed of our hope. Learn this logic and it will stand you in good stead in times of distress, when nothing but certainty will sustain you. The Lord is good, and therefore he will be good: he will keep the feet of his saints, and because he will do this we shall enter his palace with joy.

Apply this logic to prayer. God has answered prayer, and therefore he will answer it. Of this first statement many of us are witnesses. The evidences of that truth are with us in daily experience; we have proofs of the power of prayer as innumerable as the stars of heaven. Because the Lord has heard us out of his holy place we infer that he will still hear us, and therefore as long as we live will we call upon him. This is no casual thing, but it is Jehovah's perpetual name and standing memorial—the God that heareth prayer. Never while the earth endureth will he forsake the throne of grace and turn a deaf ear to the cries of his suppliant Israel.

The subject of this morning is thus introduced to you. It is necessary that you pray, for the needy must cry to their helper; and it is profitable that you pray, for the bosoms of suppliants are filled with benedictions. It is not a vain thing to wait upon God; it is your comfort, your strength, your life. If you seek honor it should be your delight to pray; for nothing is more ennobling than to win the ear of the Lord of all. A man admitted to audience with the Most High is honored in an unspeakable degree.

We shall speak this morning in the way of five observations drawn from our text. May each one be made profitable to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Our first observation is written upon the surface of the Scripture before us—THE LOWLIEST FORM OF PRAYER MAY BE MOST TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE. And what is that lowliest form of prayer? Is it not described in the text? "The desire of the humble." It is not the prayer of the serene faith of Abraham, nor the wrestling of energetic Jacob, nor the intercession of prevailing Moses, nor the pleading of holy Samuel, nor the commanding cry of Elias shutting and opening heaven: it is only a desire—a motion of the heart towards good things; and yet the Lord hears it. Indeed, the lowliest form of prayer may be the truest; for the essence of all real prayer is desire. Words are but the habitation of prayer, the living tenant is desire. We see from our text that desires are prevailing prayers; for the Lord has made a point of hearing them: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Other forms of prayer may be attractive to man, and yet they may have no influence whatever with the living God; but this manner of supplication has been successful from of old, even as it is written,—"He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him," and again, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." In fact, prayer is desire, as our poet puts it,—

> "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Utter'd or unexpress'd;
> The motion of a hidden fire
> That trembles in the breast."

The lowest form of true prayer secures the ear of the Highest, and what more is needed?

Observe, it is only *a desire:* "the desire of the humble." A desire may be altogether unattended by speech. The suppliant may not be able to put his desire into words at all: he may be too sorrowful, his emotion may choke his

utterance; he may be too quiet, and so may be quite unversed in the use of speech. He may be only able to pour forth groanings that cannot be uttered, and tears whose eloquence is silent; yet God is pleased to hear the desire which lacks expression. Many prayers are very prettily expressed; in fact, they are expressed so grandly that their tawdry fineries will not be tolerated in heaven. Those prayers will never enter heaven's gate which are meant to catch the applause of man. God will say, "They were meant for men, and let men have them!" He does not stoop to accept man's leavings, and if a prayer is meant to be a feast for man, God will not be a second-rate guest at its table. On the other hand, many sincere persons condemn themselves because they cannot offer public prayer as their brethren do: they even tremble, perhaps to pray before their families, and this is a grief to them. I think, if they are men, they should prove their manhood by overcoming such diffidence. I would urge them to make the attempt with much resolution and perseverance; but should they fail in it through positive inability, there will be cause for regret, but no reason for self condemnation. There may be more prayer in the silent than in the fluent. God has heard prayers which nobody else could possibly have heard, because there was no vocal sound about them. So quick is the ear of God that he heareth that which is not properly the subject of hearing; the true prayer which abides in silence shall not meet with a silent God.

This desire may not be recommended by any conscious attainments on the part of the offerer. The man may reach far in his desire, but he may have attained to little beyond. He may have a wealth of desire and a poverty of everything else, and yet he may be heard of the Lord. Possibly his confession may run thus,—"I

desire to be humble, but I lament my pride; I desire to be strong in faith, but I mourn my unbelief; I desire to be fervent, but I sigh over my lukewarmness; I desire to be holy, but I confess my transgressions; I desire my prayer should be such as God can accept, but I fear that I waver, or ask amiss." Now such a confession, if penitently presented, will not prevent our obtaining the promise; for the Lord hath heard the desire of the humble. If your heart seethes and boils with desires, the stream thereof will rise to heaven. If your stock-in-trade is made up of empty vessels, and little else, the Lord can deal with you as he did with the prophet's widow, "who had empty vessels not a few." Your little oil of grace he can multiply till every vessel is filled to the brim.

Have you desires?—great, hungry, thirsty desires? Then bring them to the Lord. Are your desires as insatiable as the horse leech, which is always sucking, but which alway craves for more, crying ever, "Give, give, give"? Then say with David, "All my desires are before thee," and be assured that the Lord satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Be comforted if your desires are awake. You are praying, and your cry is being heard: you shall yet say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Your desires have voices of their own: they knock hard at heaven's door, and it shall be opened unto them.

Note again, that this desire may be unaccompanied by any confident expectation. When you pray you ought to believe the promise and expect its fulfilment. It is the duty and the privilege of every suppliant to believe that when he prays in the name of Jesus he must and shall be heard. But sometimes humility, which is a good thing, is attended by a want of faith, which is an

evil thing; and this much hinders prayer. Humility is deceived by unbelief, and so it gives way to the dark thought that its poor feeble prayer will not speed with God. I fear that in some cases this want of expectancy is an effectual barrier to prayer, and prevents its being answered; but it is forgiven to naturally despondent, heavily-laden spirits, whose fears are not so much doubts of God as a deeply humiliating judgment of themselves. It is not so much the case that this faith is sinfully defective as that they have a painfully acute sense of their own unworthiness; and so when they cry they hope that the Lord will hear them, and they mean to wait upon him till he does; but they are sore afraid. They will go nowhere else, for other hope they have none but that which lies in the free grace and sovereign mercy of God; but yet they do not exercise that happy expectancy which the sure promise warrants their enjoying. My brethren, I would chide your unbelief, but I would still encourage your desires; for that desire which God hears is not to be despised. The text saith, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble," and the Lord will yet hear your humble sighs and groans; and you shall be surprised to find the Lord doing for you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or even thought. May your faith grow exceedingly, being fed upon the heavenly food which the Lord deals out to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This leads me to observe that this commencing form of prayer which the Lord nevertheless hears, is here further described as "*the desire of the humble.*" It has this advantage about it, that it is free from pride. Some men's prayers, if they were to pray them as their foolish heart really desires, would be requests that they might be made famous. Startle not when I say it,—I fear that

many men proudly ask to be humble: they desire to be humble in order that they may be admired for it. I have no doubt whatever that some professors seek great grace that they may be highly thought of and greatly set by in the market of the church. Have we not all found that in the rushing stream of our earnest zeal there will be some back-water, which runs not towards God but towards ourselves? Have we not even striven to win souls that we might be notable as soul-winners? Ay, and have we not sought to glorify God that we might shine in the reflection of that Glory? "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," has been the language of many a Jehu. Oh, it is hard to keep out pride. This psalm says much concerning the proud man and the oppressor, whom God abhors, and will surely visit in judgment; and then shines forth this bright word, like a lone star in a dark night. Never was precious pearl found in a rougher oyster-shell. May the Lord keep us humble if we are so, and make us humble if we are not so. I believe every Christian man has a choice between being humble and being humbled. Now, to be humble is a sweet thing: there is no lovelier spot on the road to the celestial city than the Valley of Humiliation: he that lives in it dwells among flowers and birds, and may sing all day long, like the shepherd boy whose song ran thus,—

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

If you do not choose to be humble you will have to be humbled; and that is not at all a desirable thing. To

be humbled is to be sorely smitten and made to suffer shame in the estimation of your fellowmen, both ungodly and godly. Certain persons who have carried their heads very high have struck them against the beam, and have had to go with bruised foreheads for the rest of their lives. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Therefore may God help us to offer before him "the desire of the humble."

"The desire of the humble" is saturated with a gospel spirit, and therefore is acceptable with the God of all grace. Pride seems born of the law, though I scarce know why it should be; for the law censures and condemns. Humility is the child of the gospel, and is brought up upon the knees of grace. If thou wouldst be a child of God thou must be lowly in thine own esteem. If thou wouldst be heard in prayer thou must come to God as needy and empty. Low thoughts of ourselves are the companions of prevailing prayers. No man may expect to receive out of the fulness that is treasured up in Christ Jesus until he is willing to confess his own poverty. Grace for grace will be given only to those who feel need upon need; all successful pleadings must find their argument in free grace. We must never urge claims against the Lord as though he were our debtor; for then mercy will not treat with us: we have appealed unto the Cæsar of justice and unto Cæsar we must go. Let us have done with merits and deserts, and let this be our cry, "For thy mercy and for thy truth's sake, and for thy Son's sake, hear thou the voice of my prayer." This is the proper gospel spirit; but if we plead in any other fashion, we shall be sent empty away.

Still, this "desire of the humble" is apt to be somewhat restricted and straitened. If we contract our de-

sires to the measure of our deserts, they will shrivel into nothing; for our deserts are less than nothing. It is ill to pray according to your sense of what you have a right to ask. You have a legal right to ask for nothing but justice, and who among us can abide its action apart from Jesus? "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" You had better pray according to God's command, and that runs thus: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The truest humility is that which is immediately obedient to the gracious precept, and accepts without a question that which the Lord so freely gives. We have a natural right to nothing; but when the Lord commands us to open our mouths wide, he thereby gives us a covenant right to all things. Yet, dear brother, if your humility should cramp your desire, if you feel as if you would desire a great boon but dare not, still it is a desire.

If you say, "I see the sweetness of the mercy, but it seems too good for such a soul as mine," yet I spy at the back of your humility a true and strong desire, and I pray that the Lord may hear that desire and answer thee for his mercy's sake. Forget not this first truth—that what seems to be the lowest form of prayer is, nevertheless, true prayer.

II. Our second point is full of comfort to those who have begun to pray. GOD IS QUICK TO HEAR THE LOWLIEST PRAYER: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." *This must be a divine science,*—this art of hearing desires. We have heard a good deal lately about thought-reading. I give no opinion of that matter among men; but here is a wonderful instance of it with the Lord. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This kind of desire-reading is the prerogative of God alone. He knows our desires even when we do not know them ourselves.

Sitting in this Tabernacle you are desiring, but it is quite impossible for the person sitting next to you to know your wishes, and it is quite as well, perhaps, that it is so. Certain it is that the servant of God, Eli himself, fresh from the shrine of the Most High, could not read Hannah's desire. Her lips were moving, and one would think if anything would be learned it might be from the moving of the lips; but Eli thought her drunken, and therefore chattering to herself, and so he rebuked her. Was it not a mercy for Hannah that God heard her humble desire, and knew all about it? Beloved, the Lord is reading your thought now: my dear sister, your groaning out of the very deeps has ascended to the heights. You would not like to tell your inward feelings: perhaps your secret is too painful to be told: never mind, God's ear is so quick that he can hear your desires. Wonderful art! We should be very glad if the Lord had promised to hear us when we speak; but he has gone far beyond that, and he hears the unspeakable and unutterable. Was there ever power and pity like to this? Be comforted, you that are full of desires this morning, and are sitting here with hearts ready to break, crying in your spirit, "Oh that the Lord would hear me! Oh that he would give me peace! Oh that the days of my mourning were ended! Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" Do not sink in despair, there is no reason for fear; your case is among the most hopeful, for it is the way of the Lord to hear the desire of the humble.

It is an art which has been exercised by God in all ages; he does not merely possess the power, but he exercises it. I like my text for putting it in the past tense: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." It is a matter of frequent fact, and not merely a possible event. It is

not the bare assertion of a power, but the record of a deed. All along through history, wherever gracious men have lived, their hearts have talked with God as well without words as with them. The pulsings of human spirits God has heard as surely as if they had been loud as the beat of drum. The sigh of the soul has come up before him as clearly as if it had been the note of a clarion. The Lord's ear is never heavy, he is not weary of the feebleness and faultiness of the poor man's petition. Still the Lord heareth in the day of trouble, and the name of the God of Jacob defends us.

> "When God inclines the heart to pray,
> He hath an ear to hear;
> To him there's music in a groan,
> And beauty in a tear."

To-day let this be told; it ought not to be buried in ungrateful silence; it is mentioned in the text, let it be mentioned in your conversation. If some here present had the opportunity, we could tell you how God has heard our desires, and how at times before the desire has actually been formed in the soul the answer has come, according to that word, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." We had a desire laid upon our heart which we never communicated to any living person except the living God, and we carried that desire in our heart for weeks and months, constantly allowing it to burn in our bosom, and frequently letting it break out in groans and broken cries: and in due time our sighing reached the heart of God. As surely as we have sown in prayer we have in due season reaped a harvest of blessing. Our Lord even in Gethsemane was heard in that he feared—sure pledge to all his redeemed that they shall be heard in their hour

of darkness. Happy are they who dwell in God, for they may have what they please at the mercy-seat. Is it not written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart?" Has it not been so with you, O ye who abide under the shadow of the Almighty? I charge you then, abundantly to utter the memory of his great goodness. Fail not to tell your experience of the Lord's faithfulness; for God loses much glory, and poor sinners and saints too, lose much encouragement to pray when children of God are silent about their success at the throne of grace. Oh, I wish I could be the means of stirring some this morning to pray the prayer of faith while sitting here. You may say, "I will pray when I get home." You may do so, if you please; but I am urging you to something more speedy. Remember the publican: it was in God's house that he prayed; though he did not dare to lift his eyes to heaven, yet he sighed in his soul this prayer,—"God be merciful to me a sinner," and he went down to his house justified rather than the other. I do not ask you to withhold that prayer till you reach home: would it not be a grand thing to be saved here, and to go home justified? You shall have that unspeakable blessing now if your desire be a true one, and you pour it out at once before the Lord believingly. He has heard the like many times, and is prepared to hear you in the same manner. Why should not this first Sunday in October be a day of grace unto your souls? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." This is an accepted time; the Spirit of God is near. If God is now inclining you to pray, do not resist the gentle movement of his Spirit, but let your prayer come forth, encouraged by the sweet language of my text. Say you unto the prayer-hearing God, "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble.

Why shouldest thou not hear my desire at this hour, and bless me, even me also, O my Father?"

III. Thirdly, we will remark that THE HEART IS THE MAIN MATTER IN PRAYER. That is clearly shown in the text: "Lord, thou has heard the desire of the humble." Desires are the fruit of the heart. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." When God comes to deal with men in a way of grace, his first business is to prepare their hearts; so that most assuredly the state of the heart is of prime importance. The heart is the source, the seat, and the essence of supplication. Prayer with the heart is the heart of prayer: the cry of our soul is the soul of our cry.

Without the heart prayer is a wretched mockery. There is as much grace in the bark of a dog or the grunt of a swine as in a form of prayer if the heart be absent; and God is as likely, nay, more likely, to hear the cry of ravens and young lions, than to regard prayers uttered in chapels or churches, meeting-houses or cathedrals, if the mind be not in earnest. Do not say, "I read my collect this morning;" you may read fifty collects, and be none the better: do not say, "I went through the prayer which I learned from a godly mother; you may go through it twenty thousand times, and yet never pray once. Unless the heart speaks with God, thou hast done nothing for thine own good with all thy paternosters or other goodly words; nay, thou mayest have done something to thine own hurt in all this pretence of praying. I fear that much so-called public prayer is nothing better than presumptuous sin. If your child should come to you and ask a favor in an affected voice, would you notice him? If, instead of saying, "Dear father, I want so-and-so," he should take up a book, and intone such words as these, "Dearly beloved father, I have to request of thee that

thou in thy great affection wilt give unto me such and such things," you would not regard his nonsense. You would say, "Come, boy, what do you want? Tell me plainly;" and if he continued to intone, you would drive him out of the room, perhaps with the aid of your foot. I fear that this praying in sing-song is the most fearful mockery God ever hears. Fancy Peter, when he was beginning to sink, intoning, "Lord, save me." When the heart really gets to speak with God, it cannot talk in affected tones: it throws such rubbish overboard. But cannot a man pray with his heart and yet use a written prayer? Certainly he can. Many have done so for years. If you cannot walk without your crutches, I would sooner you walked with them than not at all. Still, it is not the best words put together by the most devout men that ever lived, nor the holiest language composed extemporaneously by yourself, that can make up prayer if the heart be gone. Words are seldom more than the baggage of prayer. Language at best is but the flesh in which prayer is embodied: the desire of the heart is the life of the prayer. See thou to thy heart, for God sees to it: "Thou wilt prepare their heart." Sometimes the Lord puts words into men's mouths: he says, "Take with you words, and come unto me," and thus he prepares words for their use; but in general the main concern with God is that the heart be prepared to plead with him.

Without the heart prayer is a nullity, and *when there is but little heart, prayer is a failure.* He that prays with little desire asks God to refuse him. If you go through your prayer, and your mind is wandering up and down about a thousand vanities, your desires are feeble, and your supplication will effect little. Prayer must be fervent to be effectual, it must be ardent to be

acceptable. If the utter failure of your prayer would not greatly grieve you, and if its success would not much gratify you, then depend upon it you will have to wait long at mercy's wicket ere it will admit you. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Importunity is indispensable: our Lord has given us many parables to that effect. To play at praying will never do: heart and soul must be fully awake; for no sleepy prayer can enter heaven. We must praise God with our whole heart, and we must pray in the same manner. If a double-minded man may not expect to receive anything of the Lord, neither may a half-hearted man. Above all things, keep thine heart with all diligence if thou wouldest speed at the throne.

Success comes to the prayer of a glowing heart. When the soul grows warm, and the spirit is fervent, and desires are strong, then, brother, do not spare thy prayers. We are not always in that condition, let us pray much when we are. We are bound to prepare ourselves for prayer; but I believe the best qualifications are strong desires and intense longings. No preparation for food is equal to intense hunger. You have the best sauce with your meat when you are hungry. It will be your wisdom when your desires are sharp-set to pray more than you ordinarily do. You cannot always pray alike; but when good times come use them. When a fair wind fills the sails of desire, then make all possible headway. Set apart a longer season for private devotion when the soul is all alive and active in it. At another time you may have to try very hard and make but small progress, for the chariot wheels may be taken off; let it not at such a time be a source of regret that you wasted a happier season. Cease not to obtain blessings beyond number both for thyself, for the church, and for a perish-

ing world; but take heed that thy heart be found greatly exercised with longings of soul before God.

IV. Fourthly, GOD HIMSELF PREPARES THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." I am greatly rejoiced by this statement that God will prepare our hearts to pray, because it is a most *important* business on which so much depends. On the heart the whole machinery of life depends, and it needs preparing, especially for devotion. You cannot spring out of bed and on every occasion pray in a moment without thought or reflection: you cannot say to yourself, "I have just been listening to ungodly talk; and now I am going to pray." It will be poor, pitiful praying which springs up from the barren soil of thoughtlessness. We need preparation in coming into the courts of the Lord's house: the soul had need put her shoes from off her feet because the place is holy. But this preparation is often as *difficult* as it is needful; and therefore it is a great mercy that our God undertakes to work it in us. Surely none but the Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterwards. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labor. Before musicians begin to play, they attend to their strings and see that their instruments are in order; you wish that the operation could be dispensed with, but it cannot be, and it is one of the most needful parts of the musician's work. Until he has learned to tune his instrument, what does he know? Until he has tuned it, what can he do? I wish we were all made ready, as a people prepared for the Lord.

These processes by which the heart is prepared *may have commenced far back.* Our gracious God may have

prepared the heart of a man to pray to-day by a work which he wrought upon him, or for him, twenty years ago: the Lord may be working a man up to a certain prayer by years of sorrow or joy. The poet who composes a sonnet may not be able to tell you why the inspiration came to him at that particular moment; for it may have been the outcome of his soul throughout the whole of his life. That which the songster threw into words to-day may have lain hidden in his soul from his boyhood. He was not prepared for penning his stanzas then, but his after-life trained him to speak in numbers, and to clothe noble thoughts in the dress of attractive language. So may it be with our prayers; they may be the juice of a life-vintage, the ripened harvest of youth and manhood. In any case, God prepares the heart to be blest when he is prepared to bless it.

One of the most difficult things in preparation for prayer is the *restraining of loose and wandering thoughts.* I do not know how perfect brethren keep themselves free from every evil thought, for I find myself defeated often when I would shut out these vile intruders. Honestly, I may express my belief that these carnal boasters have as many vain thoughts as other people. The ravenous birds will come down upon the sacrifice, even when Abraham offers it, and it costs infinite pains to drive them away. Intruding thoughts surround us like a plague of flies; they are here, and there, and everywhere. It is well, indeed, that God should prepare our hearts; for in this one point our weakness is complete. Egypt suffered from a plague of flies, which all Pharaoh's armies could not drive away; but when the Lord heard the prayer of Moses, it is said, "The Lord removed the swarms of flies; there remained not one." That was a deliverance indeed: truly this

was the finger of God. When the Lord comes to prepare his people's hearts by his Spirit, he chases away every wandering thought, so that there remains not one. The tradition says of Solomon's temple that though much meat was consumed there, and this naturally attracts flies, yet there was never a fly in the holy place. I wish it were so with our holy place! O that it might be so that whenever we pray all evil thoughts may be driven out. This is a miracle, and none can perform it but the Lord our God. "Thou wilt prepare their heart."

Next, the Lord prepares his people's hearts by *giving them a deep sense of what they want.* I know your grief, and your temptation, and your misery, and the crying out of your spirit under the lashes of conscience; but all this is right, thus you are instructed in the art and mystery of supplication. Nobody cries to Christ so well as the man who is beginning to sink. Jonah's cry in the whale's belly was the most intense prayer he ever prayed. When the iron enters into your soul, then you cry unto the Lord in your trouble. A sentence of death in your own soul is a mighty quickener of supplication; when your spirit is overwhelmed with sorrow, then look up to Christ, the Saviour, and find him to your soul's joy. Our desires are apt to sleep, but when the Lord by his Spirit reveals to us our spiritual poverty, we long, and pine, and sigh for spiritual blessings.

When a man out of the anguish of his heart cries for mercy, then he begins to search out and *lay hold upon the promise.* To bring the promise to remembrance is a part of the Holy Spirit's work; he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Oh, how blessedly a man can pray when he gets hold of a promise, when

he is sure that God hath a blessing in store for him, when he is positive that the Lord is faithful to his covenant, and will not withhold any good thing from him. The Lord also works in us *strong faith, holy perseverance, and high expectancy*, and in all these ways he prepares our hearts to pray.

Nor is this all: the text does not say that God will only prepare the heart to pray, but it says, "Thou wilt prepare the heart," and this is a wider work, making ready for other matters besides prayer. He will prepare the heart to receive the answer, for many of us are not as yet ready to enjoy what God is ready to bestow. Do you want anything which Jesus can give you? Give your heart up to the Holy Spirit, that he may prepare you to seek the blessing, and prepare you to receive the blessing when the time comes for the Lord to grant it. "Thou wilt prepare their heart;" this is wonderful condescension on God's part, and on our part we ought to feel the utmost encouragement to prepare our own hearts for earnest supplication.

V. Lastly, PRAYER FROM PREPARED HEARTS MUST BE HEARD. "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." I wish you would join these two sentences together in your minds, and carry them home with you. Let the two bells ring in harmony.—"Thou wilt prepare their heart: thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ring them over and over again; and let their blended music linger in your ear.

First, *if God has had love enough to prepare your heart to pray, he has grace enough to give you the blessing.* The more difficult thing of the two is not to give the blessing, but to prepare your heart to cry for it: if he has done the one he will certainly do the other.

Consider *the truthfulness and the faithfulness, and the*

goodness of God, and you will see that it is not possible that he should teach a man to pray for a blessing which he will not give. I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you do not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then, when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick, if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray he means you to receive. You find a holy desire in your heart; the Lord put that desire into your heart, and for the honor of his infinite majesty, lest he stain his goodness and dishonor his great name, he must hear you. With what comfort would I address those here who are beginning to pray. I know I speak to some who are uneasy, unrestful; you tell us you are seeking peace, that day and night a desire for salvation occupies the entire chamber of your soul. Well, this did not come from your own nature; neither the devil nor the old Adam has taught you to pray. Dear hearer, be sure that the great Father who is moving you to cry to him is hearing you—he is inclining his ear to catch the faintest moan of your spirit. Believe that he is hearing you. Cast yourself at the feet of his dear Son. Behold the wounds of Jesus; let these invite you to draw nigh to God. I know of no such eloquent mouths as the wounds of the dying Lord. Let them persuade you to come to Jesus, to trust, to rest at his dear feet; for since he has inclined your heart to pray he is about to hear you and bless you. The Lord be with you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

XIII.

OBADIAH; OR, EARLY PIETY EMINENT PIETY.

October 19, 1884.

"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."—I Kings xviii. 12.

I suspect that Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow-believer. Elijah was the man of action—bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah, and others like him. He says, "They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a prophet, was a man of mark; but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like himself. I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds somewhat to undervalue

quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages, against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known, and may even shun the least recognition; therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to under-estimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness. Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal, and naturally he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary over again, in some respects.

The Lord does not love that his servants, however great they are, should think lightly of their lesser comrades, and it occurs to me that he so arranged matters that Obadiah became important to Elijah when he had to face the wrathful king of Israel. The prophet is bid den to go and show himself to Ahab, and he does so; but he judges it better to begin by showing himself to the governor of his palace, that he may break the news to his master, and prepare him for the interview. Ahab was exasperated by the terrible results of the long drought, and might in his sudden fury attempt to kill the prophet; and so he is to have time for consideration, that he may cool down a little.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah, and bids him go and say to Ahab, "Behold Elijah." It may sometimes be the nearest way to our object to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior. He who never feared the face of kings nevertheless found himself using as his helper a far more timid individual. The Lord may put you, my dear brother, who are so eminent, so useful, so brave, perhaps, so severe, into a position in

which the humbler and more retiring believer, who has not half the grace, nor half the courage that you have, may, nevertheless, become important to your mission; and when he does this he would have you learn the lesson, and learn it well, that the Lord has a place for all his servants, and that he would not have us despise the least of them, but value them, and cherish the good that is in them. The head must not say to the foot, I have no need of thee. Those members of the mystical body which are weakest are yet necessary to the whole fabric. The Lord does not despise the day of small things, neither will he have his people do so. Elijah must not deal harshly with Obadiah. I would that Obadiah had had more courage: I wish that he had testified for the Lord, his God, as openly as Elijah did; but still every man in his own order; to his own master every servant must stand or fall. All lights are not moons, some are only stars; and even one star differeth from another star in glory. God hath his praise out of the least known of the holy characters of Scripture; even as the night hath its light out of those glimmering bodies which cannot be discerned as separate stars, but are portions of nebulous masses in which myriads of far-off lights are melted into one.

We learn further from the narrative before us, that God will never leave himself without witnesses in this world. Aye, and he will not leave himself without witnesses in the worst places in the world. What a horrible abode for a true believer Ahab's court must have been! If there had been no sinner there but that woman Jezebel, she was enough to make the palace a sink of iniquity. That strong-minded, proud, Sidonian Queen twisted poor Ahab round her fingers just as she pleased. He might never have been the persecutor he was if his

wife had not stirred him up; but she hated the worship of Jehovah intensely, and despised the homeliness of Israel in comparison with the more pompous style of Sidon. Ahab must yield to her imperious demands, for she would brook no contradiction, and when her proud spirit was roused she defied all opposition. Yet in that very court where Jezebel was mistress, the chamberlain was a man who feared God greatly. Never be surprised to meet with a believer anywhere. Grace can live where you would never expect to see it survive for an hour.

Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh, Daniel was a trusted counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus, Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus, and there were saints in Cæsar's household. Think of finding diamonds of the first water on such a dunghill as Nero's palace. Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were ensamples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some light: the darkest cavern of iniquity has its torch. Be not afraid; you may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium. In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints, and quits the levees of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers.

I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these his special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sons the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had

revolted it was a child, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. The Lord hath to-day—I know not where—some little Luther on his mother's knee, some young Calvin learning in our Sunday-school, some youthful Zwingle singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse; I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way; but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous; and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before; but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men. Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the ark of the Lord; it shall go safely on in God's predestined way. Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries his workmen, but his work lives on. If there be not in the palace a king who honors God, there shall yet be found there a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's prophets, and hide them away till better days shall come. Wherefore be of good courage, and look for happier hours. Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

Concerning Obadiah I wish to speak with you this morning. His piety is the subject of discourse, and we wish to use it for stimulating the zeal of those who teach the young.

I. First, we shall notice that Obadiah possessed EARLY PIETY—"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Oh that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same. Happy are the people who are in such a case!

How Obadiah came to fear the Lord in youth we cannot tell. The instructor by whom he was led to faith in Jehovah is not mentioned. Yet we may reasonably conclude that he had believing parents. Slender as the ground may seem to be, I think it is pretty firm, when I remind you of *his name.* This would very naturally be given him by his father or his mother, and as it signifies "the servant of Jehovah" I should think it indicated his parents' piety. In the days when there was persecution everywhere against the faithful, and the name of Jehovah was in contempt because the calves of Bethel and the images of Baal were set up everywhere, I do not think that unbelieving parents would have given to their child the name of "The servant of Jehovah" if they themselves had not felt a reverence for the Lord. They would not idly have courted the remarks of their idolatrous neighbors and the enmity of the great. In a time when names meant something, they would have called him "The child of Baal," or "The servant of Chemosh," or some other name expressive of reverence to the popular gods, if the fear of God had not been before their eyes. The selection of such a name betrays to me their earnest desire that their boy might grow up to serve Jehovah, and never bow his knee before the abhorred idols of the Sidonian Queen. Whether this be so or not, it is quite certain that thousands of the most intelligent believers owe their first bent towards godliness to the sweet associations of home. How many of us might well have borne some such a name as that of Obadiah; for no sooner did we see the light than our parents tried to enlighten us with the truth. We were consecrated to the service of God before we knew that there was a God. Many a tear of earnest prayer fell on our infant brow and sealed us for heaven; we were nursed in the

atmosphere of devotion; there was scarce a day in which we were not urged to be faithful servants of God, and entreated while we were yet young to seek Jesus and give our hearts to him. Oh, what we owe, many of us, to the providence which gave us such a happy parentage! Blessed be God for his great mercy to the children of his chosen!

If he had no gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a believer in the Lord in those sad days, unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or perhaps good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbor, who dared to gather little children round about him and tell of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their falsehoods. No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth, and it does not matter: does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God. Not unto us be the glory. If souls are saved, God has the honor of it. He knows what instrument he used, and as he knows it, that is enough. The favor of God is fame enough for a believer. All the blasts of fame's brazen trumpet are but so much wasted wind compared with that one sentence from the mouth of God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Go on, dear teachers: since you are called to the sacred ministry of instructing the young, do not grow weary of it. Go on, though you may be unknown, for your seed sown in the darkness shall be reaped in the light. You may be teaching an Obadiah, whose name shall be heard in future years; you are providing a father for the church, and a benefactor for the world. Though your name be forgotten, your work shall not be. When that illustrious day shall dawn,

compared with which all other days are dim, when the unknown shall be made known to the assembled universe, what you have spoken in darkness shall be declared in the light.

If it was not in this way that Obadiah was brought to fear the Lord in his youth, we may think of methods such as the Lord deviseth for the bringing in of his banished. I have been very pleased lately, when I have been seeing enquirers, to talk with several young persons who have come out from utterly worldly families. I put to them the question, "Is your father a member of a Christian church?" The answer has been a shake of the head. "Does he attend a place of worship?" "No, sir, I never knew him to go to one." "Your mother?" "Mother does not care about religion." "Have you any brother or sister like-minded with yourself?" "No, sir." "Have you any single relative who knows the Lord?" "No, sir." "Were you brought up by anyone who led you to attend the means of grace and urged you to believe on the Lord Jesus?" "No, sir, and yet from my childhood I have always had a desire to know the Lord." Is it not remarkable that it should be so? What a wonderful proof of the election of grace! Here is one taken out of a family while all the rest are left; what say you to this? Here is one called in early childhood and prompted by the secret whispers of the Spirit of God to seek after the Lord while all the rest of the family slumber in midnight darkness. If that is your case, dear friend, magnify the sovereignty of God and adore him as long as you live, for "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy."

Still, I take it, the major part of those who come to know the Lord in their youth are persons who have had the advantage of godly parents and holy training.

Let us persevere in the use of those means which the Lord ordinarily uses, for this is the way of wisdom and duty.

This early piety of Obadiah's *had special marks of genuineness about it.* The way in which he described it is, to my mind, very instructive, "I thy servant *fear the Lord* from my youth." I hardly remember in all my life to have heard the piety of children described in ordinary conversation by this term, though it is the common word of the Scriptures. *We* say, "The dear child loved God." We talk of their "being made so happy," and so forth, and I do not question the rightness of the language; still, the Holy Spirit speaks of "The fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom;" and David says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Children will get great joy through faith in the Lord Jesus; but that joy, if true, is full of lowly reverence and awe of the Lord. Joy may be the sweet fruit of the Spirit, but it also may be an excitement of the flesh; for you remember that they upon the stony ground, which had not much depth of earth, received the word with joy, and the seed sprang up immediately; but as they had no root, they withered when the sun was risen with burning heat. We cannot consider the exhilaration with which hearts receive the novelty of the gospel to be the very best and surest sign of grace. Again, we are pleased with children when we see in them much knowledge of the things of God, for in any case such knowledge is most desirable; yet it is not conclusive evidence of conversion. Of course that knowledge may be a divine fruit; if they are taught of the Spirit of God it is indeed well with them: but as it is more than possible that we ourselves may know the Scriptures and understand the whole theory of the gos-

pel and yet may not be saved, the like may be true in the case of our youth. The fear of God which is so often neglected is one of the best evidences of sincere piety. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us. When either child or adult has the fear of God before his eyes, this is the finger of God. By this we do not mean the servile fear whch worketh dread and bondage, but that holy fear which pays reverence before the majesty of the Most High, and has a high esteem of all things sacred, because God is great, and greatly to be praised. Above all things young people need a dread of doing wrong, tenderness of conscience, and anxiety of spirit to please God. Such a principle is a sure work of grace, and a surer proof of the work of the Holy Ghost than all the joy a child can feel, or all the knowledge it can acquire. I ask all teachers of the young to look well to this. There is a growing flightiness about the religion of the present day which makes me tremble. I cannot endure the religion which swims only in boiling water and breathes only in heated air. To me the whisper of the Spirit has no relationship to a brass band, much less does godliness treat the great God and the Holy Saviour as matters for irreverent clamor. The deep-seated fear of the Lord is what is wanted, whether in old or young: it is better to tremble at the word of the Lord, and to bow before the infinite majesty of divine love, than to shout oneself hoarse. O that we had more of the stern righteousness of the Puritans, or of the inner feeling of the olden Friends. Men nowadays put on their shoes and stamp and kick, and few seem to feel the power of that command, given of old to Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The truth of God is not

meant to inflate us, but to humble us before the throne. Obadiah had early piety of the right kind.

Beloved, you do not need that I should at this point speak to you at large upon *the advantages of early piety.* I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful, and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men, and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman, and so to have a holy companion in his march towards heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the church and not in the tavern; his helpers in virtue, and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it. The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits, and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature; to form new ones is hard work; but those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse,—

> "'Tis easier work if we begin
> To serve the Lord betimes;
> But sinners who grow old in sin
> Are hardened in their crimes."

I am sure it is so. Moreover I notice that, very frequently, those who are brought to Christ whilst young grow in grace more rapidly and readily than others do.

They have not so much to unlearn, and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the devil are missed by those whom the Lord brings into his church before they have wandered far into the world.

As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown-up man, strikes at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force: the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory, and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister's sermon fails, the child's prayer may gain the victory. Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years; for others seeing the little one saved say to themselves, "Why should not we also find the Lord?" By a certain secret power it opens closed doors, and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for truth, a child's love has done it. It is still true, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." Go on, go on, dear teachers, to promote this most precious of all things beneath the sky, true religion in the heart—especially in the heart of the young.

I have taken up, perhaps, too much time upon this early piety, and therefore I will only give you hints, in the next place, as to its results:

II. Youthful piety leads on to PERSEVERING PIETY. Obadiah could say, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Time had not changed him; whatever his

age may have been, his religion had not decayed. We are all fond of novelty, and I have known some men go wrong as it were for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work; roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious indeed. For the grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threatenings against the saints, is a great marvel, but for the grace of God to preserve a believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, is quite as great a miracle, and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time; he was found to be when old what he was when young.

Nor was he carried away by the fashion of those evil times, To be a servant of Jehovah was thought to be a mean thing, old-fashioned, ignorant, a thing of the past; the worship of Baal was the "modern thought" of the hour. All the court walked after the God of Sidon, and all the courtiers went in the same way. My lord worshipped Baal, and my lady worshipped Baal, for the queen worshipped Baal; but Obadiah said, "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth." Blessed is the man who cares nothing for the fashion, for it passeth away. If for a while it rageth towards evil, what hath the believing man to do but to abide steadfastly by the right? Obadiah was not even affected by the absence of the means of grace. The priests and Levites had fled into Judah, and the prophets had been killed or hidden away, and there was no public worship of Jehovah in Israel. The temple was far away at Jerusalem; therefore he had no opportunity of hearing anything that could strengthen him or stimulate him; yet he held on his way. I wonder how long some professors would keep up their profession

if there were no places of worship, no Christian associations, no ministrations of the word; but this man's fear of the Lord was so deep that the absence of that which is usually wanted for the sustenance of piety did not cause him to decline. May you and I personally feed upon the Lord Jesus in the secret of our souls, so that we may flourish even though we should be far removed from a profitable ministry. May the Holy Ghost make us steadfast, unmovable evermore.

Added to this, there were the difficulties of his position. He was chamberlain of the palace. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage; but there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah. He must have had to walk very delicately, and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person, and was a little afraid even of Elijah, lest he was giving him a commission which would lead to his destruction. He came to be extremely prudent, and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience, nor jeopardise his position. It wants an uncommonly wise man to do that, but he who can accomplish it is to be commended. He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and fled into Judah, where the worship of Jehovah continued; but he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position, and therefore he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory you may as well retire; but he is the brave man who when the bugle sounds retreat does not hear it, who puts his blind eye to the telescope and can-

not see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds, and does all the damage he can to the enemy. Obadiah was a man who did in truth "hold the fort," for he felt that when all the prophets were doomed by Jezebel it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished so much. I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I should greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place. His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult. The part of Elijah is much safer and grander. The prophet's course was plain enough, he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab; he had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel. How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him "My lord Elijah;" and well he might, for morally he was far his inferior. Yet I must not fall into Elijah's vein myself lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that he could manage Ahab's household with Jezebel in it, and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that *he feared the Lord greatly.*

He persevered, too, notwithstanding his success in life; and that I hold to be much to his credit. There is nothing more perilous to a man than to prosper in this world and become rich and respectable. Of course we desire it, wish for it, strive for it; but how many in winning it have lost all, as to spiritual wealth! The man used to love the people of God, and now he says, "They

are a vulgar class of persons." So long as he could hear the gospel he did not mind the architecture of the house; but now he has grown æsthetic, and must have a spire, gothic architecture, a marble pulpit, priestly millinery, a conservatory in the church, and all sorts of pretty things. As he has filled his pocket he has emptied his brains, and especially emptied his heart. He has got away from truth and principle in proportion as he has made an advance in his estate. This is a mean business, which at one time he would have been the first to condemn. There is no chivalry in such conduct; it is dastardly to the last degree. God save us from it; but a great many people are not saved from it. Their religion is not a matter of principle, but a matter of interest: it is not the pursuit of truth, but a hankering after society, whatever that may mean; it is not their object to glorify God, but to get rich husbands for their girls: it is not conscience that guides them, but the hope of being able to invite Sir John to dinner with them, and of dining at the hall in return. Do not think I am sarcastic: I speak in sober sadness of things which make one feel ashamed. I hear of them daily, though they do not personally affect me, or this church. This is an age of meannesses disguised under the notion of respectability. God send us men of the stuff of John Knox, or, if you prefer it, of the adamantine metal of Elijah; and if these should prove too stiff and stern we could even be content with such men as Obadiah. Possibly these last might be harder to produce than Elijahs: with God all things are possible.

III. Obadiah with his early grace and persevering decision became a man of EMINENT PIETY, and this is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of

Ahab's court! This is a wonder of grace indeed. This man's religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elias did, he was not called to such a career; but it dwelt deep within his soul and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him; she looked askance at him, but she could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind. Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked and was still a man. I have noticed that the most yielding husbands like to indulge in some notion that they are not quite governed by their spouses, and it is possible that on this account Ahab retained Obadiah in his position. At any rate, there he was, and he never yielded to Ahab's sin, nor countenanced his idolatry. Account for it how you may, it is a singular circumstance that in the centre of rebellion against God there was one whose devotion to God was intense and distinguished. As it is horrible to find a Judas among the apostles, so it is grand to discover an Obadiah among Ahab's courtiers. What grace must have been at work to maintain such a fire in the midst of the sea, such godliness in the midst of the vilest iniquity!

And his eminent piety was very *practical;* for when Jezebel was slaying the prophets he hid them away from her—one hundred of them. I do not know how many servants of the Lord any of you support, but I have not the privilege of knowing any gentleman who sustains a hundred ministers; this man's hospitality was on a grand scale. He fed them with the best he could find for them, and risked his life for them by hiding them away in caves from the search of the queen. He not only used

his purse but staked his life when a price was set upon these men's heads. How many among us would place our lives in jeopardy for one of the Lord's servants? At any rate, Obadiah's fear of the Lord brought forth precious fruit, and proved itself to be a powerful principle of action.

His godliness was such, too, that it was recognised by the believers of the day. I feel sure of that, because Obadiah said to Elijah, "Was it not told my lord how I hid the Lord's prophets?" Now, Elijah was the well-known head and leader of the followers of Jehovah throughout the whole nation, and Obadiah was a little astonished that somebody had not told the great prophet about his deed; so that though his generous act may have been concealed from Jezebel and the Baalites, it was well known among the servants of the living God. He was well reported of among those whose good report is worth having; it was whispered about among them that they had a friend at court, that the chamberlain of the palace was on their side. If anybody could rescue a prophet he could, and therefore the prophets of God felt secure in giving themselves up to his care; they knew that he would not betray them to bloodthirsty Jezebel. Their coming to him and confiding in him shows that his faithfulness was well known and highly esteemed. Thus he was strong enough in grace to be a leader recognized by the godly party.

He himself evidently knew Elijah, and did not disdain at once to pay him the utmost reverence. The prophet of God, who was at that moment hated of all men because of the judgment which had been inflicted by his means, and was the special object of the king's pursuit, was honored by this gracious man. Early piety is likely to become eminent piety; the man who is likely

to fear God greatly is the man who serves God early. You know the old proverb, "He that would thrive must rise at five." It is as applicable to religion as to anything else. He that would thrive with God must be with God early in his days. He who would make great progress in the heavenward race must not lose a moment. Let me urge young people to think of this, and give their hearts to God even now.

Sunday-school teachers, you may be training to-day the men who will keep the truth alive in this land in years to come, the men who will take care of God's servants and be their best allies, the men and women who will win souls to Christ. Go you on with your holy work. You do not know whom you have about you. You might well imitate the tutor who took his hat off to the boys in his school because he did not know what they would turn out to be. Think very highly of your class: you cannot tell who may be there; but assuredly you may have among them those who shall be pillars in the house of God in years to come.

IV. Obadiah's early religion became COMFORTABLE PIETY to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger he pleaded his long service of God, saying, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth"; just as David, when he grew old, said, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works; now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." It will be a great comfort to you, young people, when you grow old to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not trust in it, you will not think that there is any merit in it; but you will bless God for it. A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows grey.

A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had living in the family an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child, and had lived to bring up your children, would you turn her into the street when she was past her work? No; you will do your best for her; if it is in your power you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and he will never turn off his old servants. I sometimes cry—

> "Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,
> But train me for thy will;
> For even I, in fields so broad,
> Some duties may fulfil;
> And I will ask for no reward,
> Except to serve thee still."

I anticipate the time when I shall not be able to do all I do now. You and I may look forward a little to the nearing period when we shall pass from middle life to declining years, and we may be assured that our Lord will take care of us to the last. Let us do our diligence to serve him while we have health and strength, and we may be sure that he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love. It is not the way of him. "Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end." That was said of his Son, and it may be said of the Father also. Oh, believe me, there is no better crutch on which an old man can lean than the fact of God's love to him when he was young. You cannot have a better outlook to your window when your eyes begin to fail than to remember how you went after the Lord in the days of your youth, and devoted your vigor to his service.

Dear young people, if any of you are living in sin I do pray you to recollect that if you are seeking the pleasures of this world to-day you will have to pay for it by-and-by. Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee therein; but for all this the Lord will bring thee into judgment. If thy childhood be vanity, and thy youth be wickedness, thy after-days will be sorrow. Oh, that thou wouldest be wise and offer to Christ thy flower in its bud with all its beauty upon it. Thou canst not be too soon holy, for thou canst not be too soon happy. A truly merry life must begin in the great Father's house.

And you, teachers, go on teaching the young the ways of God. In these days the State is giving them secular instruction all the day long, six days in the week; and religious teaching is greatly needed to balance it, or we shall soon become a nation of infidels. Secular teaching is all very well and good; we never stand in the way of any sort of light: but teaching that has not religion blended with it will simply help men to be bigger rascals than they would be without it. A rogue with a jemmy is bad enough, but a rogue with a pen and a set of cooked accounts robs a hundred for the other's one. Under our present plans children will grow up with greater capacity for mischief, unless the fear of the Lord is set before them, and they are taught in the Scriptures and the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Instead of relaxing Sabbath-school efforts, we shall be wise to increase them greatly.

As to you that have grown old in sin, I cannot talk to you about early piety; but there is a passage of Scripture which ought to give you great hope. Remember how the householder went out at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and at last at the eleventh hour, and found

some still standing in the market-place idle. It was late, was it not? Very late. But, blessed be God, it was not too late. They had but one hour left, but the master said, "Go, work in my vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give thee." Now you eleventh-hour people, you people of sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty—I would go on to one hundred if I thought you were here of that age—you still may come and enlist in the service of the gracious Lord, who will give you your penny at the close of the day even as he will give to the rest of the laborers. The Lord bring you to his feet by faith in Christ. Amen.

XIV.

FAITH AMONG MOCKERS.

"He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."—PSALM xxii. 8.

DAVID experienced what Paul afterward so aptly described as "cruel mockings." Note the adjective *cruel:* it is well chosen. Mockings may not cut the flesh, but they tear the heart; they may shed no blood, but they cause the mind to bleed internally. Fetters gall the wrists, but the iron of scorn entereth into the soul. Ridicule is a poisoned bullet which goes deeper than the flesh, and strikes the centre of the heart. David in the wilderness hunted by Saul, and on the throne abused by Shimei, knew what it was to be the butt of scorn, the football of contempt. Many a time and oft was he the song of the drunkard, and the byword of the scoffer.

But what have I to do with the son of Jesse? my heart remembers the Son of man. What if David suffered despising and scorn? He knew it but in small measure compared with our blessed Lord. Well is it said, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord." It is not wonderful that such an one as David should have to cry, "My soul is among lions," when the Lord of all, the perfectly pure and Holy One, was driven to utter the same cry, saying, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord

that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." My brethren and sisters in Christ, if you have to pass through a like painful experience, count it no strange thing, for a strange thing it is not. Reproach is the common heritage of the godly. Do not think that this fire which you suffer is the first that ever burned a saint. Others have had to bear the enmity of the world long before you. Remember that, of old, from the first moment when sin came into the world, there were two seeds, the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent; and between these two seeds there is an enmity of the most deadly kind, which will never cease. It may assume different forms, and it may be held in check by many forces, but it will always continue for ever the same while men are men, and sin is sin, and God and the devil are opposed. It was so, you know, in the house of Abraham; he was a man that walked before God, and was perfect in his generation, and yet in his family there were the opposing powers; Ishmael, born after the flesh, mocked him that was born after the Spirit. When Rebekah had brought forth twin sons, yet the fact of their being twin sons of holy Isaac did not prevent the enmity that arose between Jacob and Esau. Nothing will prevent the seed of the serpent from exhibiting its spite towards the seed of the woman; even kinship and brotherhood go for little in this strife; in fact, a man's foes full often are they of his own household. Count it no marvel, then, if you are derided! It seems to be a necessity of the holy nature of God that it should incur the enmity of the evil nature of fallen man, and that this evil nature should show itself by direct and bitter attack. Remember "him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Henceforth, bow your shoul-

ders to the yoke; expect that if you follow the Crucified you will have to bear the cross, for so it will be. I trust that our present meditation may be useful to any of God's servants who are feeling the sharp lash of envious tongues, that they may not be driven from their steadfastness thereby. If any in their hearts are bowed down because they are conscious that possibly they have given the scoffers some opportunity to mock at them, may they even in this take heart, for David had done so, and yet he was not crushed by the blasphemies of the wicked.

The first thing to which I shall call your attention at this time is, that a truly gracious man is like David and like the Lord Jesus, in that HIS TRUST IN GOD IS KNOWN. Even the enemies of this holy man who is mentioned in the text, and, as I interpret it, even the enemies of our divine Lord and Master, never denied that he trusted in God. This, indeed, is the commencement of their scoff: "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him." From which I gather that every gracious man should have an apparent, manifest, public trust in God. He should not merely trust him in his heart alone, but that trust should so enter into his entire nature that he does not conceal it nor think of concealing it. He should be so open in the avowal of his confidence that his enemies, before whom he is naturally restrained and on his guard, nevertheless are able to spy out this precious thing within him, and are forced to bear their witness, though it be mockingly and jestingly, that "He trusted on the Lord." Such a testimony is all the more valuable as coming from an enemy. You know our character is not likely to be drawn too prettily by those who hate us; the utmost will be sure to be said against us; but if even our enemies say of us, "He trusted on the Lord,"

we may be very thankful that we have so lived as to extort this testimony from their lips.

What, then, ought a child of God to do in order to show that he really does trust in the Lord? How did Jesus do this? Well, I think that in our Lord's case it was *his wonderful calmness* which compelled everybody to see that "he trusted on the Lord." You never find him in a flurry; he is never worried nor confused. He is beset behind and before with men who try to catch him, but he is as self-possessed as if he spoke among friends. He does not appear to be the least upon his guard, and yet instead of their catching him, before long he either catches them, or else they retire saying, "Never man spake like this Man." He was always cool, peaceful, ready, self-composed. You notice his inward quietude not only when enemies are round about him, but when he is surrounded by a great mob of people all hungry, starving, famishing: he breaks the bread and multiplies it; but not before he has made them all sit down on the green grass by hundreds and by fifties. He will have them in companies, arranged in ranks, for convenient distribution; and when they are all placed in in order, as if it had been a well-marshalled royal entertainment, then it is that he takes the bread, and, looking up to heaven, with all deliberation asks a blessing, and breaks and gives the food to the disciples. The disciples make no scramble for it; it is an orderly festival, and the thousands are all fed in order due, in majestic decorum; for Christ was calm, and therefore master of the situation. He never looks as if he had fallen into difficulties, and then adopted expedients to get out of them; but his whole life is pre-arranged and ordered in the most prudent and peaceful manner. Nothing upon this earth, although he was so reduced that he had nowhere to lay

his head, although he was sometimes so weary that he sat down upon a well to rest, could put him out of the way, or disarrange his perfect collectedness. He was always ready for every emergency; in fact nothing was an emergency to him. What a beautiful picture that is of Christ on board ship in a storm! While they that are with him are afraid that they will go down, that the wind will blow them into the water, or blow the water over them, so that they will certainly be drowned, what is he doing? Why, he is asleep: not because he forgot them—no; but because he knew that the vessel was in the great Father's hands. It was his time for sleep; he was weary and needed it, and so he carried out that which was the nearest duty, and in all peacefulness laid his head on a pillow, and slumbered. His sleep ought to have made them feel at ease. Whenever the captain can afford to go to sleep, the passengers may go to sleep too. Depend upon it, he that manages everything would not have gone to bed if he had not felt that it was all right in the hands of the Highest, who at any moment could stay the raging storm. I wish we could be similarly restful; for then even our enemies would say of us, "He trusted on the Lord." I wish we could have that steadfast, imperturbable frame of mind, in which our Lord untied the knots wherewith his foes would have bound him; for then our assailants would marvel at our quiet confidence. Jesus knew no hurry, but calmly and deliberately he met each matter as it came, and grandly kept himself free from all entanglement. Oh, for the holy quiet which would prevent our going about our business in haste! "He that believeth shall not make haste," but do everything as in the infinite leisure of the Eternal, who never is before his time, and never is behind. If we could do that, and did not get

so flurried and worried, and tossed about and driven to our wit's end, then our enemies would say with astonishment, "He trusted on the Lord."

Brethren, this ought also to come out not merely in our calm and quiet manner, but also *by our distinct avowal.* I do not think that any man has a right to be a secret believer in the Lord Jesus Christ at this time. You will tell me that Nicodemus was so; that Joseph of Arimathæa was so, and I answer "Yes"; but therein they are not our exemplars. These weak brethren were forgiven and strengthened; but we may not therefore presume. Times, however, are different now: by the death of Christ the thoughts of many hearts were revealed, and from that day those secret disciples were among the foremost to avow their faith. Nicodemus brought the spices, and Joseph of Arimathæa went in boldly and begged the body of Jesus. Since that day when the Christ was openly revealed upon the cross, the thoughts of other men's hearts are revealed too; and it is not now permissible for us to play hide-and-seek with Christ. No; "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved:" "He that with his heart believeth and *with his mouth maketh confession of him*, shall be saved." The open confession is constantly, in Scripture, joined with the secret faith. The Lord Jesus Christ puts it, "He that denieth me before men, him will I deny"; and if you read it, the text sets denying in opposition to confession, so that it really means, "He that does not confess me before men, him will I not confess when I come in the glory of the Father." Our Lord does not reckon upon leading a body of followers who will always keep behind the hedge, hiding themselves in holes and corners whenever there is anything to be done for his glory, and only running out at meal-times when there

is something to be got for themselves. I know some professors of that sort, but I have very little to say to their credit; they are a cowardly crew. No, no. We ought distinctly to declare that we believe in God, and we should take opportunities, as prudence dictates, of telling to our friends and neighbors what our experience has been about trusting in God; telling them of deliverances we have received, of prayers which have been answered, and of many other tokens for good which have come to us as the result of our faith in God. To trust in man is a thing of which we may be ashamed, for we find man to be as a broken reed, or as a spear that pierces us to our heart when we lean thereon; but blessed are they that trust in the Lord, for they shall be as trees planted by the rivers of water, they shall bring forth their fruit in their season, and even their leaf shall not wither. God, in whom they trust, will honor their faith, and bless them yet more and more; let them therefore honor their God, and never hesitate to speak well of his name. So, then, I say first a calm belief, and, secondly, an open avowal should cause even our adversaries to know that we have trusted in the Lord.

And, then, I will add to that, that *our general conduct should reveal our faith.* The whole of our life should show that we are men who rejoice in the Lord; for trusting the Lord, as I understand it, is not a thing for Sundays and for places of worship alone: we are to trust in the Lord about everything. If I trust the Lord about my soul I must trust him about my body, about my wife, about my children, and all my domestic and business affairs. It would have been a terrible thing if the Lord had drawn a black line around our religious life, and had said, "You may trust me about that, but with household matters I will have nothing to do." We need the whole of life

to be within the ring-fence of divine care. The perfect bond of divine love must tie up the whole bundle of our affairs, or the whole will slip away. Faith is a thing for the closet, and the parlor, and the counting-house, and the farmhouse; it is a light for dark days, and a shade for bright days; you may carry it with you everywhere, and everywhere it shall be your help. Oh, that we did so trust in the Lord that people noticed it as much as they notice our temper, our dress, or our tone. The pity is that too often we go forward helter-skelter, following our own wisdom, whereas we ought to say, "No, I must wait a little while, till I ask counsel of the Lord." It should be seen and known that we are distinctly waiting upon God for guidance. What a stir this would make in some quarters! I wish that without any desire to be Pharisaical, or to display our piety, we nevertheless did unconsciously show the great principle which governs us. Just as one man will say, "Excuse me, I must consult a friend," or, "I must submit the case to my solicitor," so it ought to be habitual with a Christian before he replies to an important matter, to demand a moment wherein he may wait upon God and obtain direction. In any case I wish that it be so usual with us to ask guidance from above that it may be noticed as our habit to trust on the Lord.

Once more, I think this ought to come out most distinctly *in our behavior during times of trouble;* for then it is that our adversaries are most likely to notice it. You, dear sister, have lost a child. Well now, remember that you are a Christian woman, and sorrow not as those that are without hope. Do let the difference be real and true, and do not be ashamed that others should observe it. When your neighbor lost her child it occasioned a quarrel between her and God, but it is not so with

you, is it? Will you quarrel with God about your baby? Oh, no; you love him too well. And you, brother, you are perplexed in business, and you know what a worldling does: if he has nothing more than outward religion, he complains bitterly that God deals hardly with him, and he quarrels with God: or, perhaps, to make things better, he does what he ought not to do in business, and makes them a great deal worse. Many a man has plunged into rash speculations until he has destroyed himself commercially; but you, as a Christian man, must take the matter calmly and quietly: it is not yours to speculate, but to confide. Your strength lies in saying—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." You must not be so eager to be rich that you would put forth your hand to do iniquity in order to seize the golden apples: that is the reverse of faith. You are now to play the man, and in the power of the Holy Ghost you are now with resignation—with more than that—with a sweet acquiescence in the Divine will—to show men how a Christian can behave himself. I have never admired Addison's words as some have done, who, when he came to die, sent for a lord of his acquaintance, and said, "See how a Christian can *die.*" There is a little parade about *that;* but I do desire that every Christian should say in his soul, "I will show men how a Christian can *live.* I will let them see what it is to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me. Those who do not believe there is a God shall yet be led to feel there must be a God, because my faith in him doth speed so well, and I obtain such unnumbered blessings as the result of it." I say, most earnestly, that especially in the time of sorrow and bereavement, when other people are sore put to it because they have lost their joy, and the light of their

house is quenched, it is the believer's duty and privilege by his holy calm of heart to show his trust in God. If religion cannot help you in trouble, it is not worth having; if the Spirit of God does not sustain you when you lose your dearest friend, you ought to question whether it is the Spirit of God; you ought to ask, "Can this be the Spirit which bore up the martyrs at the stake?" if now that you are passing through these waters you are carried away by them? If our faith shines out in dark times, even as the stars are seen by night, then is it well with us.

Oh, that you and I might in all these ways so live that all who see us should know that we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ! It would be ridiculous if a man went into society with a label on his breast, "*This man trusts in God*," and it would be a pretty clear sign that he needed to be thus ticketed. I would have you shun all distinctive phylacteries in matters of religion as too much flavored with the leaven of the Pharisees; but when the possession of godliness proclaims its own self, even as a box of precious spikenard tells its own tale, you need not be ashamed of it. Display and ostentation are vicious, but the unrestrained use of influence and example is commendable. In these days when men glory in their unbelief, let us not be bashful with our faith. If, in a free country, men should not persecute an infidel, they certainly ought not to silence a believer. We do not intend to smuggle our religion through the land. It is not contraband, and therefore we shall bear it with us openly in the sight of all men, and let them say if they please, "He trusted on the Lord."

II. Secondly, THIS TRUST ON THE PART OF BELIEVING MEN IS NOT UNDERSTOOD BY THE WORLD. "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him." Observe that they restricted the

Saviour's trust to that point—"He trusted on the Lord *that he would deliver him.*" But now, in the first place, *our faith is not confined to merely receiving from God.* No, brethren; if the Lord does not deliver us we will trust him. See how firmly Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood to it that they would not bow before the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But *if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." There was great faith in that "If not." We must not live and wait upon God with a kind of cupboard love, just as a stray dog might follow a man for bones; but we must speak well of our God even if he scourge us, for therein lies both the truth and the strength of faith. Job has put it—"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Whatever happens to us, if our faith is the work of the Holy Spirit we shall hold on to our trust in God.

Neither is our faith limited to what men call deliverance. It is a misrepresentation when his enemies say, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him;" because though it is the truth it is not the whole truth. Our blessed Lord continued to trust in the Father though the cup did not pass from him, and though no legions of angels were sent to deliver him from Pilate. Though the enemy was permitted to exercise all his malice upon him until his blessed body was nailed to the accursed tree, yet the faith of our divine Lord and Master was not moved from its steadfastness. He trusted in God for something higher than deliverance from death, for he

looked beyond the grave, and said, "Thou will not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." In all his pains his heart said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." The blind world cannot understand this. They say, like their father, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" They insinuate that Christian people trust God for what they get out of him. Now I have often thought that if the devil could have put it the other way he would have been very rejoiced to do so. Suppose he could have said, "Job serves God for nought," then the ungodly world would have shouted, "We told you so. God is a bad paymaster: his servants may serve him as perfectly as Job, but he never gives them any reward." Happily the accuser's grumble is of quite the opposite kind. Neither one way nor another is there any pleasing the devil, and it is not a thing we desire to do. Let him put it as he likes. We serve God and we have our reward; but if the Lord does not choose to give us exactly what we look for, still will we trust in him, for it is our delight. It is a misrepresentation to say of a believer that "he trusted on the Lord *that he would deliver him*," if he is supposed to trust for no other reason.

And, dear friends, *our faith is not tied to time.* That is the mistake of the statement in the text. They said, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him"—as much as to say, "If God does not deliver him *now* his trust will have been a folly, and God will not have answered to his confidence." But it is not so. Brethren, if we are in the fire to-night, and we are trusting in God, our faith does not mean that we expect to come forth from the furnace at this very hour. Nay, we may not come out to-night, nor to-morrow, nor next month, it may be not for years. We do not tie God down to con-

ditions, and expect him to do this and that, and then if he does not in his wisdom see fit to do it, threaten that we will trust him no more. The very worst we could do would be to make the Eternal God a slave to time, as though he must do everything at our bidding, and measure his divine movements by the ticking of a clock. The Lord did deliver his Son Jesus Christ, but he suffered him to die first; he was put into the grave before he was uplifted from the power of death; and if it had not been that he died and lay in the tomb he could not have had that splendid deliverance which his Father did vouchsafe him when he raised him again from the dead; had he not yielded to death there could have been no resurrection for him or for us. So, beloved, it may be God has not effected his purpose with you yet, nor has he quite prepared you for the height of blessing to which he has ordained you. Receive what he is going to give you, and take gratefully the painful preliminaries. High palaces must have deep foundations, and it takes a long time to excavate a human soul so deep that God can build a gorgeous palace of grace therein. If it be a mere cottage that the Lord is to build in you, you may escape with small troubles; but if he is going to make you a palace to glorify himself withal, then you may expect to have long trials. Course pottery needs not the laborious processes which must be endured by superior vessels. Iron which is to become a sword for a hero must know more of the fire than the metal which lies upon the road as a rail. Your eminence in grace can only come by affliction. Will you not have trust in God if severe trials are ordained for you? Yes, of course you will. The Holy Spirit will be the all-sufficient helper of your infirmities. I say it is misrepresentation if we limit the Holy One of Israel to any form for our deliver-

ance, or to any time for our deliverance. Let not the Lord of love be treated like a child at school, as if he could be taught anything by us!

So, also, *our faith must not judge at all by present circumstances.* The ungodly world judges that God has not delivered us because we are now in trouble, and are at present distressed by it. Oh, how wrongly the world judged of Christ when it judged of him by his condition! Covered with a bloody sweat and groaning out his soul to God beneath the olives at midnight—why, they that passed by who did not know him must have judged him to be a man accursed of God. "See," they would have said, "we never heard of a man that sweat blood before—sweat blood in prayer; and yet listen to his groaning; he is not heard by God, for evidently the cup does not pass from him." If any man had looked at our Lord Jesus when he was on the cross and had heard him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" they would have certainly concluded that he was the most ungracious and undeserving of men; for had he been a saint, surely, they say, God would not have forsaken him. Yes, but you see they only saw a little of our blessed Master's career; they only looked upon a span of his existence; what a grievous error it was to have estimated his life by his brief passion, knowing nothing of its grand intent! See him now while harps unnumbered sound his praises and all heaven rejoices to behold his glory, and the Father looks upon him with ineffable delight! This is the same Jesus who was crucified! What think you of him now? You must not measure a man by a little bit of his life, nor even by the whole of his earthly career; for it is nothing compared with the hidden future of his life in eternity. These men measured David's faith, and measure our

faith by what they see of us on one day: we are sick, we are sorry, we are poor, we are troubled, and then they say, "We told you so! This faith of theirs is not worth having, or else they would not fare so roughly or be found in so much heaviness." Faith and feeling are in contrast. Outward circumstances must never be made the tests of the value of pious trust in our God. We must not judge God by his dealings with us nor judge ourselves thereby; but let us still hold on to this pure, simple faith that the Lord is good to Israel. Let us love the Lord for a whole eternity of his love, and then for everything, for every turn of his hand, for every frown and stroke and rebuke; for he is good in everything, unalterably good. If with this faith of ours we are praying and pleading and God does not answer us, does not help us, but leaves us in the dark, yet still let not our trust waver. If any man walk in darkness and see no light, let him trust and trust on until the light shall come.

So, then, we have just touched upon two points—that a true man's faith is soon made known, but that, though it be known, it is usually misunderstood. We live among blind men; let us not be angry because they cannot see.

III. Thirdly, THIS TRUE FAITH WILL, IN ALL PROBABILITY, BE MOCKED AT SOME TIME OR OTHER. It is a great honor to a man to trust in God, and so to have his name written upon the Arch of Triumph which Paul has erected in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, where you see name after name of the heroes, who served God by faith. It is a glorious thing to mingle our bones with those who are buried in that mausoleum which bears this epitaph, "These all died in faith." It is an honorable thing to be a believer in God, but there are some who think the very reverse, and these begin to scoff at the believer. Sometimes *they scoff at faith itself:* they count faith itself to be

a folly of weak minds. Or else they insult over one particular Christian's faith. "Oh," they say, "*he* professes to trust in God. This man talks after this mad fashion! Why, he is a working man like other people —works in a shop along with me. What has he to do with trusting God any more than I have? He is conceited and fanatical." Or in other circles they cry, "This is a man of business; he keeps a shop, and I dare say he knows as much of the tricks of the trade as we do, and yet he talks about trusting in God. No doubt he pretends to this faith to win religious customers." Sometimes the mockery comes from one of your own family, for faith's foes live in the same house with her. The husband has been known to say to his wife, "Ridiculous nonsense, your trusting in God!" Ay, and parents have said the like to holy children; and, alas! children have grown up to speak in like fashion to their parents to the wounding of their hearts. As if faith in God were a thing that could be scoffed at, instead of being the most wise, and proper, and rational thing under heaven. Faith in God is a thing to be reverenced rather than reviled. True religion is sanctified common-sense. It is the most common-sense thing in the world to put your trust in One that cannot lie. If I trust myself, or trust my fellow-man, I am thought to be in the first case self-reliant, and in the second case I am judged to have a charitable disposition; yet in either case I shall, sooner or later, prove my folly; but if I trust God, who can bring a reason against my confidence? What is there to be ridiculed in a man's trusting his Maker? Can HE fail that created the blue heavens, that settled the foundations of the earth and poured out the waters of the great sea? Can the Almighty retract his promise because he is unable to fufil it? Can he break his word

because circumstances master him and prevent his performance of it? "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." The day shall come when it will be known by all intelligent beings that unbelief of God is folly, but that faith in the Eternal is essential wisdom. God give us more faith in himself. No doubt we may expect to have all the more of the laughter of the ungodly, who will make a spectacle of us for our faith: but what of that? We can bear mockery and much more for his sake who died for us.

And then *men scoff at the very idea of divine interposition.* They judge the Lord's deliverance to be the main point of our faith. "He trusted God that he would deliver him." "Look," they say, "he fancies that God will deliver *him*, as if the Creator had not something else to do besides looking after *him*, poor miserable creature that he is! He is nothing to God—a mere speck—the insect of an hour, and yet he trusts in God to interfere on his behalf." The philosophers laugh whenever you speak of divine interposition, and count that we must be in the last stage of lunacy to expect anything of the kind. They believe in laws, they say—irreversible, immutable laws, that grind on, like the great cogs of a machine which, when once they are set in motion, tear everything to pieces that comes in their way. They do not believe that God fulfils promises, or answers prayers, or delivers his people. Their God is a dead force, without mind, or thought, or love, or care. He who in nature acts according to law is yet believed to have no power to carry out his own word, which must always be law to a truthful being. Why, some of us are as sure that God has interposed for us as if he had rent the heavens and thrust forth his right hand visibly

before the eyes of all beholders. The wise ones laugh at us for this, but we are not abashed; rather do we reply, "Laugh if you like, and as long as you like; but we daily receive unnumbered blessings from God in answer to our cries, and your laughter no more affects us than the noise of the dogs by the Nile disturbs the flow of the river. We shall believe for all your merriment, and if it please you to go on with your laughter we also will go on with our faith." The object of the ungodly man's scorn is the idea that God should ever interfere to help his people in human affairs; but do you stand to it, O true believers; for he does still show himself strong on the behalf of them that trust in him. Let them say, and laugh at you as they say it, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him;" but let none of these things move you.

Further, we have known this mockery to extend to *all kinds of faith in the divine love.* "Let him deliver him," they say, "seeing that he delighted in him." Perhaps you have unwisely told out the tale of God's special love to those who are now making merriment of you; you have cast your pearls before swine, and they turn again to rend you. They say, "This man says God loves him above others; that he chose him before the world began; that he redeemed him from among men with the blood of Christ; that he has called him by his Holy Spirit; that he has admitted him into his secrets and made him his child;" and then they laugh again right lustily, as if it were a rare jest. How the world rages against electing love! It cannot endure any speciality in grace. The idea that one man should be more beloved of heaven than another it scouts as horrible. The heathen could not make out a certain brave saint because he called himself Theophorus, or "God-bearer;"

but he stuck to it that he was so, and this made his foes the more wrathful. God dwelt in him, he said, and he would not give up his happy belief, therefore they ceased not to mock. It was a carrying out of our text, "Let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him." Well, well, we can afford to bear these mockings; for if we are beloved by a king it will not much matter if we are sneered at by his subjects; if we are beloved by God it is a small concern though all men should make us the subject of their jest.

Ungodly men are exceedingly apt to find *amusement in the trials involved in the life and walk of faith.* Their cry of "Let him deliver him" implies that their victim was in serious difficulty from which he not could extricate himself. This is no novelty to the believer, but it makes rare fun for the ungodly. What is the good of faith if the believer suffers like others, and endures the same pains, and losses, and diseases as others? So the men of the world argue. They would be believers too if it would bring them in a fortune, or a handsome salary, or at least a loaded table and a full cup. But when they see a saint on the dunghill with Job, or in the pit with Joseph, or in the dungeon with Jeremiah, or among the dogs with Lazarus, they sneer and cry, Is this the reward of piety? Is this the recompense of godliness? They like to spy us out in our time of trouble and taunt us with our confidence in God; and, alas, there is so much unbelief in us that we are all too prone in such seasons to question the justice and faithfulness of the Lord, and to say with David, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." It seems hard for us to be mocked by the base ones of the earth, to become the song and the byword of the ungodly; yet this has happened to the excellent of the

earth and will happen yet again. Set your account that this is a part of the covenanted heritage, and accept it with joy for Christ's sake.

IV. Now, I must close with this point (though there is much more to be said): THE TIME SHALL COME WHEN THE FAITH OF THE MAN WHO HAS TRUSTED IN GOD SHALL BE ABUNDANTLY JUSTIFIED. I think it is no small thing to have *the ungodly bearing witness* that "He trusted in God that he would deliver him." I have known what it is to be exceedingly grateful to ungodly men for helping me to believe that I am truly a child of God. Somebody, years ago, uttered an atrocious lie against me—an abominable slander. I was very low and heavy of spirit at the time; but when I read it I clapped my hands for joy, for I felt, "Now I have one of the marks and seals of a child of God, for it is written, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.'" The love of the Lord's brethren and the hatred of the Lord's enemies are two things to be desired. We may gather that we are not of the wicked when they will not endure us in their company, when our very presence irritates them, and they begin to rail and jeer. It has happened unto us even as Jesus said: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." So that there is justification, as it were, of our faith even from the lips of adversaries, and we ought to be thankful for it instead of being downcast about it.

Another justification awaits us, and in due season it will come. Brethren, the day will come when *God will deliver his people.* You will be brought out of your trouble—it may not be immediately, but it will be sea-

sonably. You may most wisely in the meantime learn to glory in your tribulation; your bitters shall turn into sweets, and your losses into gains; your sorrows shall be your joys, your struggles your triumphs—perhaps in this life this transformation may occur, even as the Lord gave to Job twice as much as he had before; but certainly in the life to come you will find the tables turned. Then, what will the ungodly say? They say now, "He trusted on God that he would deliver him;" but they will be compelled to say as they gnash their teeth, "God has delivered him."

Whereas the ungodly ridicule the idea that God delights in his people, the day shall come when they shall be made to see that he does delight in them. When the Lord appears on behalf of his people, and gives them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning," the wicked shall gnash their teeth, and be filled with confusion. When the Lord shall turn again our captivity, even our most desperate foes shall be made to say, "The Lord hath done great things for them." They shall wonder and be sore vexed to see how the Lord hath a favor to his chosen. If they do not see it in this life, oh, what an exhibition ungodly men will see of his delight in his people in the world to come! Dives sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom: what a sight for him! They that scoff at God's poor people here, shall see them exalted to be kings and priests, to reign with Christ for ever and ever, and what will they say then? What can they say but be compelled to bear witness that their faith was justified.

Brethren, at the last great day ungodly men will be witnesses on behalf of the saints. If any doubt whether the saints trusted in God, the wicked will be compelled to come forward and say, "They did trust, for we laughed

at them for it." Of this and that man they shall say, "He trusted on God that he would deliver him." In that day the unbelieving will be swift witnesses against themselves; for as they ridiculed the children of God here, they will have it read out before them as evidence of their enmity against the Lord: and how will they answer it? A man is generally much grieved with any one who injures his children. I have known a man behave patiently to his neighbors, and put up with a great deal from them; but when one of them has struck his child I have seen him incensed to the last degree. He has said, "I cannot stand *that*, I will not look on and see my own children ill-used." The Lord says, "He that touches you touches the apple of my eye." Jesus rises from his throne in glory and stands up indignantly while his servant Stephen is being stoned. If I had no other amusement whatever, I would not for merriment sake mock the people of God; for it will go hard with those who make unhallowed mirth out of the saints of the Most High. If any of you have ever done so—if you have done so ignorantly—the Lord forgive you, and bring you to be numbered among his people, as was Saul of Tarsus; and if any of you have done so knowingly, be humble and penitent, and the Lord will forgive you and receive you amongst his people.

But whether ye revile or flatter, it is all one to us. We are at a pass with you: we do trust in God that he will deliver us, and we cannot be removed from this confidence. O ye mockers, we will not be fooled out of our hope, nor jested out of our peace. We cannot find any one like our God to trust to, and so we will not depart from him in life or death, but will rest in him, come what may, even till we see him face to face.

XV.

JEHOVAH-JIREH.

October 12, 1884.

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."—GENESIS xxii. 14.

"ABRAHAM called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh," or "Jehovah will see it," or "Jehovah will provide," or "Jehovah will be seen." We are offered a variety of interpretations, but the exact idea is that of seeing and being seen. For God to see is to provide. Our own word "provide," is only Latin for "to see." You know how we say that we will *see to* a matter. Possibly this expression hits the nail on the head. Our heavenly Father sees our need, and with divine foresight of love prepares the supply. He sees to a need to supply it; and in the seeing he is seen, in the providing he manifests himself.

I believe that the truth contained in the expression "Jehovah-jireh" was ruling Abraham's thought long before he uttered it and appointed it to be the memorial name of the place where the Lord had provided a substitute for Isaac. It was this thought, I think, which enabled him to act as promptly as he did under the trying circumstances. His reason whispered within him, "If you slay your son, how can God keep his promise to you that your seed shall be as many as the stars of heaven?" He answered that suggestion by saying to himself, "Jehovah will see to it!" As he went upon that painful

journey, with his dearly beloved son at his side, the suggestion may have come to him, "How will you meet Sarah when you return home, having imbrued your hands in the blood of her son? How will you meet your neighbors when they hear that Abraham, who professed to be such a holy man, has killed his son?" That answer still sustained his heart—"Jehovah will see to it! Jehovah will see to it! He will not fail in his word. Perhaps he will raise my son from the dead; but in some way or other he will justify my obedience to him, and vindicate his own command. Jehovah will see to it." This was a quietus to every mistrustful thought. I pray that we may drink in this truth, and be refreshed by it. If we follow the Lord's bidding, he will see to it that we shall not be ashamed or confounded. If we come into great need by following his command, he will see to it that the loss shall be recompensed. If our difficulties multiply and increase so that our way seems completely blocked up, Jehovah will see to it that the road shall be cleared. The Lord will see us through in the way of holiness if we are only willing to be thorough in it, and dare to follow wheresoever he leads the way. We need not wonder that Abraham should utter this truth, and attach it to the spot which was to be for ever famous: for his whole heart was saturated with it, and had been sustained by it. Wisely he makes an altar and a mountain to be memorials of the truth which had so greatly helped him. His trials had taught him more of God,—had, in fact, given him a new name for his God; and this he would not have forgotten, but he would keep it before the minds of the generations following by naming the place Jehovah-jireh.

Observe as you read this chapter that this was not the first time that Abraham had thus spoken. When he

called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh he had seen it to be true,—the ram caught in the thicket had been provided as a substitute for Isaac: Jehovah had provided. But he had before declared that truth when as yet he knew nothing of the Divine action, when he could not even guess how his extraordinary trial would end. His son Isaac had said to him, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and the afflicted father had bravely answered, "My son, God will provide." In due time God did provide, and then Abraham honored him by saying the same words, only instead of the ordinary name for God he used the special covenant title—Jehovah. That is the only alteration; otherwise in the same terms he repeats the assurance that "the Lord will provide."

That first utterance was most remarkable: it was simple enough, but how prophetic! It teaches us this truth, that *the confident speech of a believer is akin to the language of a prophet.* The man who accepts the promise of God unstaggeringly, and is sure that it is true, will speak like the seers of old: he will see that God sees, and will declare the fact, and the holy inference which comes of it. The believer's childlike assurance will anticipate the future, and his plain statement—"God will provide"—will turn out to be literal truth. If you want to come near to prophesying, hold you hard to the promise of God and you shall "prophesy according to the measure of faith." He that can say, "I know and am sure that God will not fail me in this mine hour of tribulation," will, before long, drop pearls of divine confidence and diamonds of prediction from his lips. Choice sayings which become proverbs in the church of God are not the offspring of mistrust, but of firm confidence in the living God. To this day many a saying of a man of God is

quoted among us, even as Abraham's word was quoted. Moses puts it, "As it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" and we might mention many a sentence which is said unto this day which first fell from the mouth of a faithful spirit in the hour of the manifestation of the Lord. The speech of the father of the faithful became the speech of his spiritual seed for many a year afterwards, and it abides in the family of faith unto this day. If we have full faith in God, we shall teach succeeding generations to expect Jehovah's hand to be stretched out still.

True faith not only speaks the language of prophecy, but, *when she sees her prophecy fulfilled, faith is always delighted to raise memorials to the God of truth.* The stones which were set up of old were not to the memory of dead men, but they were memorials of the deeds of the living God: they abundantly uttered the memory of God's great goodness. Abraham on this occasion did not choose a name which recorded what *he* had done, but a name which spake of what *Jehovah* had done. It is true Abraham's faith was worthy to be remembered throughout all generations, for there he believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness, and the Lord said to him, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." There the patriarch had endured the extreme test: no gold was ever passed through a hotter furnace. But true faith is always modest; from her gate boasting is excluded by law. Abraham says nothing about himself at all, but the praise is unto God, who sees and is seen; the record is "Jehovah will provide." I like that self-ignoring; I pray that we, also, may have so much strength of faith that self may go to the wall. Little faith is very apt to grow proud when, to its own astonishment, it has

wrought righteousness; but strong faith so completely empties itself, and so entirely depends upon the all-sufficiency of God, that when anything is achieved it remembers nothing but the divine hand, and lays the crown where it ought to be laid. Growing in experimental acquaintance with the God of the covenant, faith has a new song and a new name for her God, and takes care that his wonderful works shall be remembered.

Note yet further, that when faith has uttered a prophecy, and has set up her memorial, *the record of mercy received becomes itself a new prophecy.* Abraham says, "Jehovah-jireh,—God will see to it"; what was he doing then but prophesying a second time for future ages? He bids us know that, as God had provided for him in the time of his extremity, so he will provide for all them that put their trust in him. The God of Abraham liveth, and let his name be praised, and let us rest assured that, as certainly as in the patriarch's distress, when there seemed no way of escape, the Lord appeared for him and was seen in the mount, even so shall it be with all the believing seed while time endureth. We shall all be tried and tested, but in our utmost need God will see us, and see to our deliverance, if we will but let faith have her perfect work, and will hope and quietly wait the moment when the Lord shall be seen working salvation. The Lord is the Preserver of men and the Provider for men. I long for all of us to get this truth firmly fixed in our hearts, and therefore I shall try to show that God's provision for Abraham and Isaac typified the far greater provision by which all the faithful are delivered from death; and that God, in providing in the mount, has given us therein a sure guarantee that all our necessities shall be provided for henceforth even for ever.

Consider, then, that the provision which God made for Abraham was symbolic of the greater provision which he has made for all his chosen in Christ Jesus. "Jehovah-jireh" is a text from which to preach concerning providence, and many have been the sermons which have been distilled from it; but I take the liberty of saying that providence, in the ordinary sense of the term, is not the first thought of the passage, which should be read with some sort of reference to its connection, and the more so because that connection is exceedingly remarkable.

I. When Abraham said "Jehovah will provide," he meant us, first of all, to learn that THE PROVISION WILL COME IN THE TIME OF OUR EXTREMITY. The provision of the ram instead of Isaac was the significant type which was before Abraham's mind; but our Lord tells us, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad;" and surely if ever Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was beyond measure glad, it was at that moment when he beheld the Lord providing a substitute for Isaac. At any rate, whether Abraham understood the full meaning of what he said or not, he spoke not for himself, but for us. Every word he uttered is for our teaching, and the teaching is this: that God, in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, made the fullest provision for our greatest needs; and from that we may infer that whatever need shall ever occur to us, God will certainly provide for it; but he may delay the actual manifestation thereof till our darkest hour has come.

"Just in the last distressing hour
The Lord displays delivering power;
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see surprising grace."

The Lord gave our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Substitute for men in view of the utmost need of our race. Isaac was hard pressed when God interfered in his behalf. The knife was lifted up by a resolute hand; he was within a second of death when the angelic voice said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." God provided instantly when the need pressed urgently. Beloved, was Isaac nearer to death than sinful man was near to hell? Was that knife closer to the throat of the beloved Isaac than the axe of the executioner was near to the neck of every sinner, aye, to the neck of the whole race of man? We have so sinned and gone astray that it was not possible for God to wink at our transgressions; he must visit our iniquities with the just punishment, which is nothing less than death eternal. I constantly meet with persons under the convincing power of the Spirit of God, and I always find that in their apprehension the punishment of sin is something terrible and overwhelming. When God deals with men by his convincing Spirit, they feel that their sin deserves nothing less than the wrath of God in hell. So it was with our race; we had altogether destroyed ourselves, and were shut up under condemnation by the law, and it was in that dread hour that God interposed and proclaimed a Saviour for men. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I would to God we all felt what a dreadful thing it is to be lost; for then we should value the provision of the Saviour much more than we do now. Oh, sirs, if no Redeemer had been provided, we might have gathered here this morning, and if you could have had patience to hear me, all I should have been able to say would have been, "Brethren, let us weep together and sigh in chorus; for we shall all die, and, dying, we shall sink into the bottomless pit, and shall abide for

ever under the righteous anger of God." It must have been so with us all if a substitute had not been found: If the gift of the loving Father had not been bestowed; if Jesus had not condescended to die in our place, we must have been left for execution by that law which will by no means spare the guilty. We talk about our salvation as if it were nothing very particular: we have heard of the plan of substitution so often that it becomes commonplace. It should not be so; I believe that it still thrills the angels with astonishment that man, when he had fallen from his high estate, and had been banished from Eden, and had become a rebel against God, should be redeemed by the blood of the Heir of all things, by whom the Divine Father made the worlds. When death and hell opened their jaws to devour, then was this miracle completed, and Jesus taken among the thorns was offered up a sacrifice for us.

God not only interposed when the death of Isaac was imminent, but also when the anguish of Abraham had reached its highest pitch. The patriarch's faith never wavered; but we must not forget that he was a man like ourselves, and no father could see his child offered up without an inward agony which surpasses all description. The anguish of so perfect a man as Abraham, a man who felt all the domestic affections intensely, as every truly godly father must feel them, and who loved his son as much as he loved his own life, must have been unspeakably great. What must have been the force of faith which enabled the man of God to master himself, to go contrary to the current of human nature, and deliberately to stand ready to sacrifice his Isaac! He must have been wound up to a fearful pitch of anguish when he lifted up the knife to slay his son; but just then the angel arrested his hand, and God provided

the ram as the substitute in the moment of his utmost misery.

Surely the world had come to a great state of misery when at last God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, that he might become the sacrifice for sin. At any rate, this I know, that as a rule men do not see Christ to be their substitute, nor accept him as their Redeemer till they feel that they lie at hell's door, and till their anguish on account of sin has become exceeding great. I remember well when I first beheld the lamb of God who suffered in my stead. I had often heard the story of his death; I could have told it out to others very correctly; but then I did not know my own pressing need, I had not come to feel the knife at my throat, nor was I about to die; and therefore my knowledge was a cold, inoperative thing. But when the law had bound me, and given me over to death, and my heart within me was crushed with fear, then the sight of the glorious Substitute was as bright to me as a vision of heaven. Did Jesus suffer in my stead without the gate? were my transgressions laid on him? then I received him with joy unspeakable, my whole nature accepting the good news. At this moment I accept the Lord Jesus as my Substitute with a deep, peaceful delight. Blessed be the name of Jehovah-jireh for having taken thought of me, a beggar, a wretch, a condemned criminal, and for having provided the Lamb of God whose precious blood was shed instead of mine.

II. Secondly, upon the mount THE PROVISION WAS SPONTANEOUSLY MADE for Abraham, and so was the provision which the Lord displayed in the fulness of time when he gave up his Son to die. The ram caught in the thicket was a provision which on Abraham's part was quite *unsought*. He did not fall down and pray, "O Lord, in thy tenderness provide another victim instead of my

son, Isaac." Probably it never entered his mind. But God spontaneously, from the free grace of his own heart, put the ram where Abraham found it. You and I did not pray for Christ to die. He died for us before we were born, and if he had not done so it would never have entered into our mind to ask for so great a gift. Until the Lord sought us we did not even seek to be saved by Christ, of the fact of whose death we had been made aware. Oh, no; it is not in man by nature to seek a Saviour: it is in God to give a Saviour, and then the Spirit of God sweetly inclines the heart to seek him; but this seeking comes not of man. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." It is ours to sin, it is God's to save. "We have turned every one to his own way, and *the Lord* hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Ours is the wandering, but the laying of those wanderings upon Jesus is of the Lord alone: we neither bought it, nor sought it, nor thought it.

In Abraham's case I believe it was an *unexpected* thing. He did not reckon upon any substitute for his son: he judged that he would have to die, and viewed him as already dead. As for ourselves, if God had not revealed the plan of salvation by the substitution of his only-begotten Son we should never have dreamed of it. Remember that the Son of God is one with the Father; and if the Holy Ghost had not revealed the fact that the offended God would himself bear the penalty due for the offence, it would never have occurred to the human mind. The brightest of the spirits before God's throne would never have devised the plan of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus. It was unexpected. Let us bless the Lord, who has done for us exceeding abundantly above what we asked or even thought in giving to

us redemption through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I may say of Christ what I could not have said of Abraham's ram, that not only was he unsought for by us and unexpected, but now that he is given he is *not perfectly comprehended.*

> "Much we talk of Jesu's blood,
> But how little's understood!
> Of his sufferings, so intense,
> Angels have no perfect sense."

I am often ready to beat upon my own breast as I study the wondrous mystery of atoning love; for it seems to me so mean a thing to be so little affected by such boundless grace. If we fully felt what God has done for us in the great deed of Jesus' death, it might not be wonderful if we were to die under the amazing discovery. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." The immortal God undertakes to bear death for man! The immaculate stands in the sinner's place. The well-pleasing Son is made accursed for those who else had been accursed for ever. He who was above all shame and sorrow laid aside his glory and became the "Man of Sorrows," "despised and rejected of men." "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." It is more extraordinary than romance! Poets may sing their loftiest stanzas, but they shall never reach the height of this great argument. "Paradise Lost" a Milton may compose, and fascinate a world with his majestic lines; but Paradise Restored by the divine substitution is not to be fully sung by mortal mind. God only knows the love of God. All the harps of redeemed men and all the hymns of adoring angels can never set forth the splendor of the love of Jehovah in

providing for our need, providing for our salvation, providing his only-begotten Son, and providing him of his own free love, unsought, and undesired of men.

III. But, thirdly, we ought to dwell very long and earnestly upon the fact that for man's need THE PROVISION WAS MADE BY GOD HIMSELF. The text says, "Jehovah-jireh," the *Lord* will see to it, the *Lord* will provide. None else could have provided a ransom. Neither on earth nor in heaven was there found any helper for lost humanity. What sacrifice could be presented to God if a sacrifice could be accepted? Behold Lebanon, as it rises majestically toward heaven, white with its snows; see the forests which adorn its sides! Set these all on fire, and see them blaze as the wood of the altar of God. Yet "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering." Take the myriads of cattle that roam the hills, and shed their blood till you have made a sea of gore, but what of that? "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Men may themselves die, but in death each man who dies only pays his own debt to nature; there is nothing left for another. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Where shall a redemption be found by which it shall be possible that the multitude of the elect shall be effectually redeemed from death and hell? Such a ransom could only be found by God, and he could only find it in himself,—in him who was one with himself, who lay in the bosom of the Father from old eternity. The provision was made by God himself, since none other could provide. God alone could say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

But was it not singular that the Lord Jehovah should provide it? When law has been broken, and its honor

has to be retrieved, it would not be judged likely that the aggrieved party should make the sacrifice. That God, against whom all the blasphemy and sin and wickedness of a ribald world was aimed, shall he himself make expiation? Shall the judge bear the penalty due to the criminal? "Lay it on the sinner; for it is his due"; so justice cries aloud,—"Lay the penalty on the transgressor"; but if a substitute can be permitted, where can one be found able and willing to become surety for the guilty? Found upon the throne! Found in the majesty that is offended! Brethren, I am beaten down by my subject; forgive me that I cannot speak of it as I would desire. There is no room here for words: it is a matter for silent thought. We want the fact of substitution to strike us, and then the cross will grow sublimely great. In vision I behold it! Its two arms are extended right and left till they touch the east and west and overshadow all races of men; the foot of it descends lower than the grave, till it goes down even to the gates of hell; while upward the cross mounts with a halo round about it of unutterable glory, till it rises above the stars, and sheds its light upon the throne of the Most High. Atonement is a divine business; its sacrifice is infinite, even as the God who conceived it. Glory be to his name for ever! It is all that I can say. It was nothing less than a stretch of divine love for Jesus to give himself for our sins. It was gracious for the Infinite to conceive of such a thing; but for him to carry it out was glorious beyond all. What shall I say of it?

I will only interject this thought here—let none of us ever interfere with the provision of God. If in our dire distress he alone was our Jehovah-jireh, and provided for us a Substitute, let us not think that there is

anything left for us to provide. O sinner, do you cry, "Lord, I must have a broken heart"? He will provide it for thee. Do you cry, "Lord, I cannot master sin, I have not the power to conquer my passions"? He will provide strength for thee. Do you mourn, "Lord, I shall never hold on and hold out to the end. I am so fickle"? Then he will provide perseverance for thee. Dost thou think that after having given his own dear Son to purchase thee he will let that work fail because *thou* canst not provide some little odds and ends to complete the work? Oh, dream not so; dote not on such a folly. Whatever thou wantest, poor sinner, if thou believest in Christ the Lord's provision of a Saviour in Christ warrants thy believing that God will provide it. Salvation begins with Jehovah-jireh, the cross and the bleeding Saviour; dost thou think it will afterwards drivel down into thy providing this and that? Oh, thy pride! Thy insane pride! Thou art to do something, art thou? What! and yoke thy little something with the Eternal God? Didst thou ever hear of an angel failing to perform a duty until he was assisted by an emmet? Hast thou ever heard of God's great laws of nature breaking down till some child's finger could supplement their force? Thou to help thy God to provide! Get thee out of the way, and be nothing; then shall God come in and be everything. Sink! It is the Lord that must rise. *He* shall be seen in the mount, and not thyself. Hide thyself, and let the glory of the Lord be manifested in thee. I wish that every troubled one here could catch this idea, and hold it fast. Whatever you want to put away your sin, whatever you want to make you a new creature, whatever you want to carry you to heaven, Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide it. He will see to it. Trust thou in him, and ere long thou

shalt see the divine provision, and Jehovah shall be glorious in thine eyes.

IV. But I must pass on. That which God prepares for poor sinners is A PROVISION MOST GLORIOUSLY MADE. God provided a ram instead of Isaac. This was sufficient for the occasion as a type; but that which was typified by the ram is infinitely more glorious. In order to save us God provided *God*. I cannot put it more simply. He did not provide an angel, nor a mere man, but God himself. Come, sinner, with all thy load of sin: God can bear it; the shoulders that bear up the universe can well sustain thy load of guilt. God gave thee his Godhead to be thy Saviour when he gave thee his Son.

But he also gave in the person of Christ *perfect manhood*,—such a man as never lived before, eclipsing even the perfection of the first Adam in the garden by the majestic innocence of his nature. When Jesus has been viewed as man, even unconverted men have so admired his excellence that they have almost adored him. Jesus is God and man, and the Father has given that man, that God, to be thy Redeemer. For thy redemption the Lord God has given thee the death of Christ; and what a death it was! I would that troubled hearts would oftener study the story of the Great Sacrifice, the agony and bloody sweat, the betrayal in the garden, the binding of the hands, the accusation of the innocent, the scourging, the thorn-crowning, the spitting in the face, the mockery, the nailing to the tree, the lifting up of the cross, the burning fever, the parching thirst, and, above all, the overpowering anguish of being forsaken of his God. Bethink thee, O soul, that to save thee the Son of God must cry, "Lama sabachthani!" Bethink thee that to save thee he must hang naked to his shame between heaven and earth, rejected of both; must cry,

'I thirst," and receive nothing but vinegar wherewith to moisten his burning lips. Jesus must "pour out his soul unto death" that we might live. He must be "numbered with the transgressors," that we might be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting. Was not this a glorious provision? What greater gift could be bestowed than one in whom God and man are blended in one?

When Abraham on the mount offered a sacrifice it was called a "burnt offering"; but when the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary died it was not only a burnt offering, but a sin offering, a meat offering, and a peace offering, and every other kind of sacrifice in one. Under the oldest of all dispensations, before the mosaic economy, God had not taught to men the distinctions of sacrifice, but an offering unto the Lord meant all that was afterwards set forth by many types. When the venerable patriarch offered a sacrifice, it was an offering for sin, and a sweet smelling savor besides. So was it with our Lord Jesus Christ. When he died he made his soul an offering for sin, and "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." When he died, he *also* offered unto God a burnt offering, for we read, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor." When Jesus died he gave to us a peace offering; for we come to feast upon him with God, and to us "his flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed." One would need many a day in which to expatiate upon the infinite virtues and excellencies of Christ, in whom all perfections are sweetly hived. Blessed be his name, God has most gloriously provided for us in the day of our need. Jehovah-jireh!

V. Fifthly, THE PROVISION WAS MADE EFFECTIVELY. Isaac did not die; the laughter in Abraham's house was not

stifled; there was no grief for the patriarch; he went home with his son in happy companionship, because Jehovah had provided himself a lamb for a burnt offering. The ram which was provided did not bleed in vain; Isaac did not die as well as the ram; Abraham did not have to slay the God-provided victim and his own son also. No, the one sacrifice sufficed. Beloved, this is my comfort in the death of Christ—I hope it is yours,—that he did not die in vain. I have heard of a theology which, in its attempt to extol the efficacy of Christ's death, virtually deprives it of any certain efficiency; the result of the atonement is made to depend entirely upon the will of man, and so is left to hap-hazard. Our Lord, according to certain teachers, might or might not see of the travail of his soul. I confess that I do not believe in this random redemption, and I wonder that any persons can derive comfort from such teaching. I believe that the Son of God could not possibly have come into the world in the circumstances in which he did come, and could not have died as he did die, and yet be defeated and disappointed. He died for those who believe in him, and these shall live, yea, they *do* live in him.

I should think that Isaac, the child of laughter, was solemnly joyous as he descended the hill and went home with his father. Methinks both of them tripped along with happy step towards Sarah's house and their own loved home; and you and I this day may go home with like joyousness. We shall not die, for the Lamb of God has died for us. We shall never perish, for he has suffered in our stead. We were bound on the altar, we were laid on the wood, and the fire was ready for our consuming: but no knife shall touch us now, for the sacrifice is offered once for all. No fire shall consume us, for he who suffered in our stead has borne the heat of

the flame on our behalf. We live, and we shall live. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." This is an effectual and precious providing. I do not believe in a redemption which did not redeem, nor in an atonement which did not atone; but I do believe in him who died in vain for none, but will effectually save his own church and his own sheep for whom he laid down his life. To him we will all render praise, for he was slain, and he has redeemed us unto God by his blood out of every kindred and people and nation.

VI. Turn we then, sixthly, to this note, that we may well glorify Jehovah-jireh because THIS PROVISION WAS MADE FOR EVERY BELIEVER. The provision on the Mount of Moriah was made on behalf of Abraham: he was himself a man of faith, and he is styled the "Father of the faithful"; and now every faithful or believing one may stand where Abraham stood, and say, "Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide." Remember, however, that our faith must be of the same nature as that of Abraham, or it will not be counted to us for righteousness. Abraham's faith worked by love: it so worked in him that he was willing to do all that the Lord bade him, even to the sacrifice of his own dear son. You must possess a living, working, self-sacrificing faith if you would be saved. If you have it, you may be as sure that you are saved as you are that you have sinned. "He that believeth on him is not condemned," because Christ was condemned for him. "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life;" he cannot die, for Christ died for him. The great principle upon which our security is based is the righteousness of God, which assures us that he will not punish the substitute and then punish the person for whom the substitute endured the penalty.

It were a matter of gross injustice if the sinner, having made atonement for his sin in the person of his covenant Head, the Lord Jesus, should afterwards himself be called upon to account for the very sin which was atoned for. Sin, like anything else, cannot be in two places at once: if the great God took my sin, and laid it on his Son, then it is not on me any more. If Jesus bore the wrath of God for me, I cannot bear that wrath; it were contrary to every principle of a just moral government that the Judge should cast our Surety into prison and exact the penalty of him, and then come upon those for whom the suretyship was undertaken. By this gospel I am prepared to stand or fall; yea, by it I will live or die: I know no other. Because I believe it, I this day cry from the bottom of my heart, "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord has provided an effectual redemption for all those who put their trust in him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation. It is true, as it is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." It is true that the faith which worketh by love brings justification to the soul.

VII. But now I close with the remark which will reveal the far-reaching character of my text. "Jehovah-jireh" is true concerning all necessary things. The instance given of Abraham being provided for shows us that the Lord will ever be a Provider for his people. As to the gift of the Lord Jesus, this is A PROVISION WHICH GUARANTEES ALL OTHER PROVISION. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Abraham learned that; for, as soon as he had slaughtered the ram, the covenant was repeated in his ears, and repeated as he had never heard it before,—accompanied with an oath. God cannot swear by any greater than himself,

and so he said, "By myself have I sworn." Thus was the covenant ratified by blood and by the oath of God. Oh, that bleeding Sacrifice! The covenant of God is confirmed by it, and our faith is established. If you have seen Jesus die for you, your heart has heard God swear, "Surely in blessing I will bless thee!" By two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, he hath given us strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel. Let us fall back on this eternal verity, that if God has provided his own Well-beloved Son to meet the most awful of all necessities, then he will provide for us in everything else.

Where will he provide? He will provide for us *in the mount*, that is to say, in the place of our trial. When we reach the place where the fatal deed of utmost obedience is to be wrought, then God will interpose. You desire him to provide for you when you lift up your eyes and see the mount afar off. He does not choose so to do; but in the mount it shall be seen, in the place of the trial, in the heat of the furnace, in the last extremity Jehovah will be seen, for he will see to it, and it shall become a proverb with you,—"In the mount Jehovah shall be seen." That is to say, when you cannot see, the Lord will see you and see to your need; for his eyes are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. You will not need to explain to God your difficulties and the intricacies of your position, he will see it all. Joyfully sing that revival ditty—

"This my Father knows."

As soon as the Lord has seen our need, then his provision shall be seen. You need not climb to heaven or descend into the deep to find it: the Lord's provision is

near at hand,—the ram in the thicket is behind you though you see it not as yet. When you have heard God speak to you, you shall turn and see it, and wonder you never saw it before. You will heartily bless God for the abundant provision which he reveals in the moment of trial. Then shall the Lord himself be seen. You will soon die, and perhaps in dying you will be troubled by the fear of death; but let that evil be removed by this knowledge—that the Lord will yet be seen, and when he shall appear you shall be manifested in his glory. In the day of the revelation of the Lord Jesus your body shall be raised from the dead, and then shall the divine provision yet more fully be discovered. "In the mount it shall be seen," and there shall God himself be manifested to you, for your eyes shall behold him and not another.

There is a rendering given to my text which we cannot quite pass over. Some read it that "in the mount the people shall be seen,"—in that mount in years to come the multitude would gather to worship God. God's presence was in the temple which was built upon that spot, and thither the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord to worship the Most High. I dwell in a house not made with hands, but piled by God of solid slabs of mercy. He is building for me a palace of crystal, pure and shining, transparent as the day. I see the house in which I am to abide for ever gradually growing around me. Its foundation was laid of old, in eternal love,—"in the mount it shall be seen." The Lord provided for me a Covenant Head, a Redeemer, and a Friend, and in him I abide. Since then, course upon course of the precious stones of loving-kindness has been laid, and the jeweled walls are all around me. Has it not been so with you? By-and-by we shall be roofed in with glory

everlasting, and then as we shall look to the foundations, and the walls, and to the arch above our head, we shall shout, "Jehovah-jireh,"—God has provided all this for me! How we shall rejoice in every stone of the divine building! How will our memory think over the method of the building! On such a day was that stone laid, I remember it right well: "I was sore sick and the Lord comforted me." On such a day was that other stone laid,—I was in prison spiritually, and the heavenly visitor came unto me. On such another day was that bejeweled course completed, for my heart was glad in the Lord and my glory rejoiced in the God of my salvation. The walls of love are still rising, and when the building is finished and the topstone is brought out with shoutings of "Grace, grace, unto it!" we shall then sing this song unto the Lord—JEHOVAH-JIREH! The Lord has provided it. From the beginning to the end there is nothing of man and nothing of merit, nothing of self, but all of God in Christ Jesus who hath loved us with an everlasting love, and therefore hath abounded towards us in blessing according to the fulness of his infinite heart. To him be praise world without end. Amen, and Amen.

XVI

THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN.

November 9, 1884.

"At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there." —1 CHRONICLES xxi. 18.

"Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel."—1 CHRONICLES xxii. 1.

DAVID was for many years searching for a site for the great temple which he purposed to build for Jehovah his God. It had been ordained that the sacrifices offered to the one God should be offered by all Israel upon one altar: but as yet the ark of the Lord was within curtains, near to David's palace, and the altar of burnt offering was situated at Gibeon, Where should the one altar be erected? Where should the ark find its permanent dwelling-place? David said, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Yet for a long time he received no indication as to the exact spot whereon the Lord's altar should be reared, save only that he was told that the Lord had chosen Zion and desired it for his habitation.

David watched, and waited, and prayed, and in due time he received the sign. God knew the spot, and had consecrated it long before by his appearance unto Abraham. The other Sabbath day, you remember, our text was "Jehovah-jireh," and we then learned that in the

mount the Lord would be seen. Upon Mount Moriah, on or near that particular spot which had been named Jehovah-jireh, was the temple to be built. Abraham had there unsheathed the knife to slay his son. Wondrous type of the great Father offering up his Only-begotten for the sins of men! The scene of that grand transaction was to be the center of worship for the chosen people. Where Abraham made the supreme sacrifice, there should his descendants present their offerings. Or if we look into the type and see God there presenting Jesus as a sacrifice for men, it was most suitable that man should forever sacrifice to God where God made a sacrifice for him. As yet it was not known to David that this was the chosen place. Now it is indicated by memorable signs: the angel of justice stands above the spot; and his sword is sheathed there in answer to the cries of the afflicted king, according to the long-suffering mercy of God. Then David clearly saw the mind of the Lord, and said, "This is the house of Jehovah my God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel." Then he commenced at once with double speed to prepare the materials for the temple. Though he knew that he might not build it, since his hands had been stained with blood, yet he would do all that he could to help his son Solomon in the great enterprise.

This problem which David had at last worked out by the good hand of God upon him, is one which in a deep spiritual sense exercises our hearts full often. Where is it that man may meet with God? How is it that man may speak with his offended Lord and be reconciled to him? Is there not some meeting-place where the sinner may express his repentance, and where mercy may grant full absolution? Many are saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Hearts touched by the Spirit

of God are still seeking after God if haply they may find him. In what condition, and by what means may man be at peace with God, and dread no longer the sword of his justice?

For the heart of some of us that problem takes a further shape: we know where man may meet with God, but we want to know how the careless, proud, rebellious heart shall be induced to come to God in his appointed way. We know it is by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the preaching of the word, and the uplifting of the all-attracting cross; but we would fain know the state of mind which will lead up to reconciliation; for now we often have to go back to him that sent us, and to cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" We would lead men to God by Jesus Christ if we could; we stretch out the finger, and we point the way, but they will not see; we stretch out both hands, and entreat them to come, but they will not yield; our heart breaketh for the longing that it hath to present every man in Christ reconciled unto the living God; but how shall it be? How shall the sinner come unto God?

We may get some light from the type before us upon that question—Where shall God's temple be? How shall men be brought to it? We speak not at this time upon natural things, but upon the things of the Spirit; therefore let us pray the Holy Spirit to enlighten and instruct us, for only by his aid shall spiritual truth enter our hearts!

And, first, I remark that *externally there was, and there is nothing in any place why it should be the peculiar meeting-place of God with man;* but secondly, that *spiritually the place which God did choose was most suitable;* for in it we read the true ground upon which God does actually meet with men in a way of grace. When we have lin-

gered over these two subjects, we shall then have to exhort you after this fashion,—*heartily let us use the place which God hath set apart to be our meeting-place with himself.* "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

I. First, then, this truth is believed by you, though, alas! not by all men, that EXTERNALLY THERE IS NOTHING IN ANY PLACE WHY GOD SHOULD THERE MEET WITH MEN.

The Lord chose the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite as the spot whereupon for many a day his holy worship should be openly celebrated according to the outward ceremonies of a typical dispensation. There the Temple was built, and for a thousand years it stood as the centre of Divine worship, so far as it was visibly presented according to his ordinance. What that mount may yet become we will not at this time consider. Prophets give us bright hints of what shall yet be even on Mount Zion, which has so long been trodden under foot of the adversary. But why was the threshing-floor of Ornan to be the meeting-place of David with his God, and the spot where prayer was to be heard?

Certainly it was *a very simple, unadorned, unecclesiastical place.* The threshing-floor of Ornan boasted no magnificence of size, or beauty of construction. There was just the rock, and I suppose a composition spread upon it of hard clay or cement, that the feet of the oxen might the better tread out the corn. That was all it was; yet when the Temple with all its glory crowned the spot, God was never more conspicuously present than on that bare, ungarnished threshing-floor. "Meet God in a barn!" saith one. Why not? Does that astonish you? God met Adam in a garden, Abraham under a tree, and Noah in an ark. There is less of man in the open field than in the cathedral, and where there is least of man

there is at least an opportunity to find most of God. "Meet God on a threshing-floor!" Why not? It may be a thousand times more sacred than many a chancel; for there simple minds are likely to pay their homage in hearty truthfulness, while in the other the artificialness of the place may foster formality. God has met with man in a dungeon, in a cave, in a whale's belly. When you have displayed all your skill in architecture, can you secure any more of the Divine presence than the disciples had in the upper room? Can you get as much of it? A tasteful building may be a way of showing your pious regard for the Lord, and so far it may be justifiable and acceptable; but take care that you do not regard it as essential, or even important, or you will make an idol of it. If the church or chapel be esteemed for its form or tastefulness, it will become a mere exhibition of skill and industry, and so be no more sacred than the house of a greedy merchant, or the palace of a profligate prince. No chisel of mason, or hammer of carpenter can build a holy place. Without either of these a spot may be none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. God chose a threshing-floor for his audience with David, just as aforetime he had chosen to reveal himself in a bush to Moses. His presence had been glorious on the sandy floor of the wilderness, in the midst of the curtains of goats' hair; and now it was gracious among the sheaves and the oxen. How can he that filleth all things care about a house which is made with hands? You know how curtly Stephen dismisses even Solomon's Temple with a word—"but Solomon built him a house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." What was that golden fane to the Infinite Majesty? Is not his own Creation sublimer far? No arch can compare with the

azure of heaven, no lamps can rival the sun and moon, no masonary can equal that city whose twelve foundations are of precious stones. Thus saith the Lord by the prophet: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made." Wherefore, then, should he not choose the hill whereon Ornan had made a hardened floor whereon to thresh his corn? At any rate that was the Lord's meeting-place with David, his audience chamber with the suppliant king; as if to show that he careth not for tabernacles or temples, but by his own presence makes that place glorious wherein he reveals himself.

Moreover, it was *a place of ordinary toil*,—not merely a floor, but a threshing-floor in present use, with oxen present, and all the implements of husbandry ready to hand. It was so ordinary, and so every-day a place, that none could have been more so: as if the Lord would say to us, "I will meet you anywhere; I will be with you in the house and in the field; I will speak with you when you till the ground, when you thresh your corn, when you eat your bread." Every place is holy where a holy heart is found. This ought to gladden the solitude of godly men. God is with you, therefore be of good cheer. If you are on board ship, or if you are wandering in the woods, or are banished to the ends of the earth, or are shut out from the Sabbath assemblies of God's house, yet

> "Where'er you seek him he is found,
> And every place is hallowed ground."

On the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite did God meet with David, and in your workroom, at your bench, or upon your bed, or behind the hedge, or in the corner

of a railway carriage, the Lord will hear you, and commune with you.

My heart rejoices when I think that this was not only a very unadorned place, and one that was given up to common uses, but it was also *in the possession of a Jebusite.* The Jebusites were among the nations doomed for their iniquities; they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise; and this vast rock on which the Temple is to stand, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, belongs at first to one of the accursed seed of Canaan. Herein the Lord showeth that he is no respecter of persons; he would meet the king, not on the land of an Israelite, but on the threshing-floor of a Jebusite. The Jews wrapped themselves up within themselves, and said, "The temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord are we": but the Lord seemed to rebuke their national pride by saying, "And your Temple is built upon the threshing-floor of a Jebusite." If they would but have remembered this, the Jews might in our Lord's day have been more tolerant of the conversion of the Gentiles to God. Moreover, Gentile blood flowed in the veins of that very king who established their empire, and who was now prostrate before his God, interceding for Jerusalem. Remember Ruth, and whence she came. She put her trust under the wings of Jehovah, God of Israel, and became the great-grandmother of David. David never seemed to forget that fact, for his psalms are full of far-reaching desires and good wishes for all the peoples of the earth. Remember his words: "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." He looks back upon his birth, as the son of Jesse and the great-grandson of Ruth, and a large heart beats within his breast, desiring

that Jehovah may be the God of the whole earth. Let us therefore, not consider our own peculiar nationality or condition, or rank among men, as if salvation came by natural descent. The blood of fallen Adam is in the veins of every man, and there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ Jesus. If you happen to have been born of parents who did not train you in the fear of God, yet do not despond; for as the Temple was built upon the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, so shall the great God dwell in your heart though your fathers knew him not. Say thou in thy soul, "The Lord shall have a dwelling within my heart, Jebusite though I be."

Once more, there was one matter in reference to Ornan's threshing-floor which it would be well to mention; before it could be used *it had to be bought with money.* I frequently meet with impossibly spiritual people who hate the mention of money in connection with the worship of God. The clatter of a collection jars upon their sublime feelings. The mention of money in connection with the worship of God is more dreadful to them than it is to God himself; for he saith, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money"; and again "None shall appear before me empty." To these pious persons money saved and hoarded is abundantly pleasant; their only objection is to giving it. In this they somewhat differ from David, who paid to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. Before he would offer a sacrifice he paid down fifty shekels of earnest money; for he said, "I will not offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah my God of that which doth cost me nothing." It is a very curious thing, is it not? that one man should show his spirituality by his liberality, and another should pretend to do it by the reverse method. In connection with all true worship of God in the olden times there

was always the offertory, and frequently the sound of gold or silver. Beneath the drawn sword of the avenging angel money is given, and land is bought. The solemnity of the transaction is not marred thereby. Yet there was no absolute need for money, since Ornan said, "Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes; lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all." David cannot endure to worship at another man's expense, and he answers "Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price." That religion which costs a man nothing is usually worth nothing. Under the old dispensation, when men went up to worship God, it was with a bullock or with a lamb; even the poorest brought at least a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. Do you think that this bringing of cattle and birds into the sanctuary would spoil your spirituality? It would do so if you have no spirituality; but if you have grace in your heart, your spirituality will choose just such a practical way in which to show itself. Some men's godliness is a thin, misty, ghostly, ghastly nothing; true adoration is a thing of substance, and of truth. The highest act of adoration that was ever paid on earth was when that woman, whose name is to be mentioned wherever this gospel is preached, emptied upon the head of our blessed Lord an alabaster box of precious nard. That gift was known to have cost her at least five hundred pence. It might have been sold for much, but the costliness of the perfume entered into the very essence of the act in the mind of the holy and grateful woman. The Lord Jesus Christ when he sat over against the treasury not only read the hearts of the givers, but he noticed the actual offering of the woman who dropped

into the box two mites that made a farthing, which were all her living. Some people would sneeringly allude to the two dirty half farthings, and condemn the collection as spoiled by Alexander the coppersmith; but the Lord is not so dainty as his servants, for he accepts the poor gifts of his people. The rattle of the coins did not take away from the heavenliness and spirituality of that woman's worship. Far otherwise. The top of Moriah, where God appoints that his Temple should be builded, saw the weighing out of gold and silver, and was all the fitter for Divine communion because thereof.

From the whole learn that it is not needful for meeting with God that you should be aided by persons arrayed in special robes, oxen will do as well; neither do you require a holy pavement, a threshing-floor may be holiness unto the Lord; neither do you need stained glass and vaulted roofs, the open air is better still. Do not believe for a moment that visible grandeur is necessary to the place where God will meet with you. Go to your threshing-floor and pray; ay, while the unmuzzled oxen take their rest, bow your knee and cry to the Lord of the harvest, and you shall meet with God there amongst the straw and the grain. Fear not to draw nigh to God in these streets, but consecrate all space to the Lord your God. Study simplicity and plainness of worship. Remember how the Lord hated altars of brick, and how he would have his people build an altar of earth or of unhewn stone, to keep his worship simple and natural. "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

II. But now, secondly SPIRITUALLY THIS THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN WAS AN ADMIRABLE TYPE OF HOW GOD MEETS WITH MEN.

I think, first, *its extreme simplicity enters into the essence of the type.* So far from thinking that a threshing-floor

was a bad place to pray in, if I look a little beneath the surface, I think I can see the reason for it. Golden grain is being separated from the straw by the corn drag—whence came this corn? From him who openeth his hand and supplieth the want of every living thing. Here, then, God meets me in the kindest way. Where can I meet him better than where he gives me food? Where can we better adore than in the midst of his rich gifts by which he doth sustain my life? Why, I think if I had gone out to gather manna every morning with my omer, I should have kept on praising God every moment as I collected the heavenly bread. Never could spot be more propitious than where the gracious Preserver of men spread out needful food for his children. We cannot do better than praise God when we are in our daily service earning our daily bread, or gathered at our meals refreshing our bodies. At the gate of God's almonry let us wait with worship. Where better a temple out of which the bread of eternal life shall come, than on a threshing-floor where the bread of the first life is to be gathered? The two things seem to meet right well together. The temporal and the eternal join hands in common consecration. That same prayer which teaches us to say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," leads us on to cry, "Give us day by day our daily bread." There is a spiritual significance in the type.

Would it be fanciful if with a glance I indicated that the *threshing-floor is the exact type of affliction?* Tribulation signifies threshing in the Latin, and the saints through much tribulation enter the kingdom. One of the titles of the people of God is "my threshing and the corn of my floor." Now it is well known that the

Lord is with his people in their trials. When he smites with one hand he holds with the other. In the lion of trial we find the honey of communion. The temple of glory is built on the threshing-floor of affliction. I do not thrust forward this observation as though it were of great weight; but even if it be a fancy so far as the type is concerned, the thought conveys a truth in a pleasing manner.

But much more, *this was the place where justice was most clearly manifest.* Above Ornan's threshing-floor, in mid-air, stood a dreadful apparition. A bright and terrible figure, a mysterious servant of God, was beheld with a drawn sword in his hand, which he brandished over the guilty city of Jerusalem. Deaths were constant. The people fell as forest leaves in autumn. Then was it that David went out to meet with his God, and make confession before him. Oh, sirs, the lack of many of you is that you have never yet beheld sin in its consequences, sin in its guilt, sin in its doom. God is angry with the sinner every day. Men do not fly to God till fear puts wings upon their feet. Take away the dread of the wrath to come, and you have removed the great impulse which makes men seek for mercy. Men will not meet God till they see the angel with the drawn sword. They will trifle and play with sin, and neglect the invitation of God, and even doubt his existence, till conviction comes home to them, and they are made to feel that sin is an exceeding evil and bitter thing. Conviction of sin wrought by the Spirit of God is more powerful than argument. I had religiousness, but I never drew near to God in spirit and in truth till I had seen and almost felt that drawn sword. To feel that God must punish sin, that God will by no means clear the guilty, is the best thing to drive a man Godward. To

feel that sword as it were with its point at your own breast, its edge ready to descend on your own being, this it is that makes the guilty plead for pardon in real earnest. Men cry not "Lord save" till they are forced to add "or I perish." I could wish for certain preachers that I hear of, that they were made more vividly to realize the terror of the Lord in their own souls. He who has felt the hot drops of despair scald his throat, has had it cleared for the utterance of free grace doctrine. If some men had more fully felt that they were sinners, they would have made better saints. David meets with God at the place where he sees that sin necessitates condign punishment, and I do not believe that any man can be in fellowship with God and be blind to that truth. David saw the result of his own sin, and dreaded what would further come if, day after day, the Lord should visit him and his people with judgment. He had grown proud of the number of his subjects, and had begun to act the independent potentate, instead of loyally remaining the viceroy of Jehovah; but now he sees that he has been guilty of high treason, and beholds the sword at his neck. There he bows himself, and there the God of all grace meets with him.

Perhaps the point which brought David out into complete brokenness of heart was a clear view of the deadly effect of his sin upon others. Seventy thousand people had died of the black death already through his sin, and still the pestilence raged; this brought the matter home to his heart. Every ungodly man ought to reflect upon the mischief which he has caused to others by his evil life: his wife has been hindered from good things, his children have grown up without the fear of God, his companions with whom he has worked are hardened in wickedness by a sight of his wickedness: youthful minds have been

seduced from virtue by his vice, simple hearts have been led into infidelity by his unbelief. O men, you know not what you do. You let fly sparks, but what the conflagration may have already been none of you can tell. Carelessly, O man, hast thou cast the thistledown to the wind; but what harvests of the ill weed have come, and may yet come, from thy single handful, who can tell? Are there not some in hell through thine influence? Are not others going there through thine unhallowed teaching? O thou whose hair is snow-white with sixty or seventy winters, how much of ruin hast thou wrought already! How much more is still to come! This came home to David, and he stood aghast at it, crying to God about it, and pleading as for his life that the evil might be stayed.

Thus, you see, when the deadly fruit of sin is clearly perceived, then the soul turns to God, and the Lord meets that soul. The cross is the place of doom; under its shadow we admit our guilt, and vividly see it, and thus put ourselves into a truthful position, where the God of truth will meet with us. God will meet with sinners when they come to him as sinners; but he will not hearken to them while they refuse to see their sin, and will not believe in the vengeance due to it.

Furthermore, that place where God met with David and made it to be his temple for ever, was the place *where sin was confessed.* David's confession is very frank and full. David says, "Is it not I? Even I it is that have sinned." Go thou, sinner, to the Lord with thine own personal confession. Shut thine eye to thy fellow-man, and say, "Father, I have sinned." Cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Make private personal confession, without comparing thyself with thy fellow-men, and the Lord has promised

to forgive thee, and all those who confess their transgressions.

Set forth in thy confession the aggravated nature of thy sin. David said, "I it is that have sinned and done evil *indeed*." He emphasizes the evil, "I have done evil *indeed*." You will not find God in a way of grace till you begin to put an "indeed at the end of the evil which you confess. Have you not sinned against light, sinned against knowledge, sinned against love, sinned against warnings, sinned against entreaties? Then, go and tell the Lord that you have sinned with grievous aggravations. "Father," said the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Where such a confession as this is offered, God will meet the sinner.

That confession also had within itself an admission of the justice of the punishment; for he says, "Let thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." He does not cavil against the sword of the Lord and its deadly blows. That sinner truly repents who feels—

> "My lips, with shame, my sins confess
> Against thy law, against thy grace:
> Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
> I am condemn'd but thou art clear.
>
> "Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce thee just in death;
> And, if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

That repentance which questions the Justice of God in the punishment of sin is a repentance that needs to be repented of; but when the penitent doth, as it were, lay his head upon the block, yield his neck to the rope, and give himself up to God, saying, "I have sinned," then mercy

feels free to display itself. As long as a man quarrels with justice he cannot be at peace with mercy. We must accept God as king, even though he beareth not the sword in vain, or else he will never put up that sword into its sheath. Condemn thyself, and God will acquit thee. Come penitently and submissively, and the just God will be a Saviour unto thee.

But this is only the beginning of it; for Ornan's threshing-floor was then the place *where sacrifice was offered and accepted.* Hastily they piled the altar of unhewn stones; they brought up to it ox after ox that had been lately threshing out the corn: the blood flowed in plentiful streams, and the sacrifice was laid upon the wood. God meets with men not where the blood of bulls and of goats flows in rivers, but where the glorious person of his own dear incarnate Son is offered up once for all for guilty men. Calvary is the tyrsting-place between God and penitents. Now we have reached it. This is the site of the temple: this is the temple "not made with hands," once destroyed, but builded up in three days. The person of the Lord Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, is that place where God meeteth guilty, confessing man, and striketh hands with him; ay, eats and drinks with him in peace, as was indicated by the peace offering which David presented, and the Lord accepted. Oh, souls, you need to see this, for if you do not see it you will never see God. A reconciled God is only to be seen through the smoke of the great sacrifice. The wounds of Christ are the windows of the heart of God. If thou canst believe in Jesus Christ, by faith presenting him again to God as thy sacrifice, then God will meet with thee.

But what did David see ere long when he had laid his bullock on the altar? A flame descended from the Lord.

Like a flash of lightning it came, and the sacrifice was consumed; sure token that the Lord had accepted it, and was well pleased because of it. Even thus has the Lord accepted the one great sacrifice for sin. When our Lord Jesus offered himself he came under the Judicial sentence, and cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was consumed with sorrow." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." The Lord himself put him to grief, and made his soul a sacrifice for sin. "He was made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And now the Lord has placed his mercy-seat where the blood is sprinkled. He accepts us in the Beloved whose sacrifice he accepted long ago when he raised him from the dead. We have access by the blood of Jesus. Come, poor trembling sinner; come with thine eye on Jesus crucified and thou shalt be welcomed of the Lord.

As soon as David had seen the sacrifice he had only one more sight to see, and that made the threshing-floor of Ornan more glorious than ever. *He beheld the sign of peace.* Above the threshing-floor stood the angel of the Lord; but what a change! The drawn sword, which threatened death to the city and to the nation, was suddenly thrust into its scabbard, and all was still. Not a soul more in Jerusalem should die of the pestilence. The sword of the Lord rested and was quiet. Oh, the joy of David's spirit when he saw this! What a solemn but joyous melting of heart he felt as his soul gushed forth in streams of gratitude. Learn from this that the point of full communion with God to-day is the place where we see the angel with the sheathed sword. Oh, how sweet to know that God hath nothing against us! He hath blotted out our transgressions, and will never remember them. He cannot smite us, for he has justified us in his

Son. How shall he destroy those for whom Christ hath shed his blood? He hath a sword, but it is for those who are the adversaries of our souls, even for the arch-fiend who would destroy us. Its edge is not for us who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. Many of you cannot draw near to God, and I do not wonder at it, because you have not yet seen that sin was in very deed put away by the sacrifice of Jesus. You have seen the drawn sword, and that is something; but you have not yet beheld that sword sheathed, nor heard the voice of Jehovah saying, "It is enough." The place where love meets love, where your little tiny stream melts into the great river of God's love, is where we sing, "O Lord, I will praise thee; for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." Henceforth our life flows with the life of Jesus in one deep, peaceful stream, onward and onward forever. You cannot rest in the Lord and live in him till you have seen the Sacrifice and its eternal results in peace with God. May God bring you there! Atonement is the basis of worship. The sacrifice of Christ and his righteousness, these are the Jacin and the Boas, the two sublime pillars of the temple gate. God communes with men where Jesus becomes man's rest. You cannot pass to the mercy-seat to speak with God except through the veil of the Saviour's body which was rent on our behalf.

Thus I think I have made you familiar with the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and showed you wherein it was felt to be a place of divine manifestation and a fit site for the permanent temple of God.

III. And now I am going to close by HEARTILY EXHORTING YOU TO USE THIS PLACE. Brethren and sisters, if we have found out where to meet with God, then let us meet with him continually. Do you feel guilty this morn-

ing? Is your sin heavy upon you? Do you see the sworded angel? Well, you have to meet God even there! Therefore, gird up your loins! "What garments shall I put on?" Put on sackcloth. I mean not literally; but while there is any guilt upon you come to God with lowliest penitence, mourning for sin, as David did, and the elders that were with him. You may not come now in the silken garments of your luxury, nor in the purple robes of your pride, nor in the mail of your hate. Put these away from you, and come with sackcloth and ashes, weeping for your transgressions, and God will meet with you; for he will meet with sinners who come to him mourning because of their sin.

When you thus come, I want you to be quiet awhile. Stand still! Listen! Suppose you had been with those elders of Israel; what would you have heard? You would have heard your shepherd-king pleading for his flock: "These sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." But now David is dead and buried, and his sepulchre is in his own land; but another King of the house of David, one Jesus, is standing before the Lord pleading for mercy. While you are clothed in the sackcloth of your repentance, you may hear him cry, "As for these sheep, let them live. Thou hast awakened the sword against me, their shepherd, therefore let my sheep be spared! Thine hand has been on me, therefore let these go their way!" Do you hear that intercession? Jesus is pleading in that fashion now. He is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Oh it is blessed to come to God that way—with the sackcloth on your loins, but with the prevalent intercession in your ears; confidently believing that Jesus maketh intercession

for the transgressors, and that he must and will so prevail that by his knowledge he shall justify many.

Further, when you are coming to God, dear hearts, always take care that you come to the sacrifice. We frequently miss communion with God, I am persuaded, because we do not remember enough that precious blood which gives us access to God. When you go up-stairs to pray, and you cannot get near to God, then do not speak, but sit in silence, and muse upon the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of the Lord, and all the circumstances of his wondrous death, and say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." There is a matchless power in the Lord's sacrifice to remove the stone out of the heart, and pluck away selfishness from the affections. Come, come, come, come to the sacrifice! There shall you dwell with God in sweet delight.

If you would come still nearer to God, do not forget the effect of the sacrifice and intercession in the sheathing of the sword of justice. I have already set forth this truth: now I entreat you to turn it to practical use by enjoying it.

> "Oh how sweet to view the flowing
> Of my Saviour's precious blood,
> With divine assurance knowing
> He has made my peace with God."

Do not say, "I hope that the sword is sheathed"; it either is so, or it is not so. Do not be content with questionable hopes, but aim at certainties. Rest not till you obtain a solid assurance of your peace with God. If Jesus Christ was punished for your sin you cannot be punished for it; if he did bear your sin he did bear it, and there is an end of it; and if you have believed on him you have the full proof in the word of God that you

are justified before God. What more do you want than God's own word for it? And that word declares that you, as a believer, have eternal life and shall never perish, neither shall you come into condemnation. Do not continue to mutter, "Well, I hope I may yet realise it." Why these debates? It is so: "he that believeth in him is justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses": God has turned away his wrath from the believer, and the sword is sheathed; therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And lastly, if this be so, and you realise it, go away and begin to build a temple. You say, "Do you want us to build a new place of worship?" No, I speak only of a spiritual house. Of course, build as many meeting-places as you can where people may come together to hear the word, for many are needed in this growing city, but the peculiar sort of building which I urge upon you is of the heart and spirit. Make your entire being a living temple for the living God. Begin now: the foundations are laid, you would not dream of building on any other; for "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." The Divine Moriah of Christ's person, the sacred place of his sacrifice is the mount wherein God shall be seen. Jesus Christ has himself become the foundation of your hope; go and build on him. Set up the pillars of earnest supplication, and arch them over with lofty praises. Remember, your God "inhabiteth the praises of Israel." Build him a house of praise, that he may dwell in you, make your bodies to be the temples of the Holy Ghost, and your spirits the priests that sacrifice therein. In acts of holiness, piety, charity, and love spend all your days. Let your houses be churches dedicated to his fear and love; and

let their chambers be holy as the courts of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Let each morning and evening have its sacrifice. Be yourself a priest at the altar. Let the garments of your daily toil be as vestments, your meals as sacraments; let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise. Let every action be a priestly function, bringing glory unto the Lord from this day forth and for ever. He that died for you reckons you to be dead to all things but himself; and so it becometh you to be. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," and from this day forward your motto should be,—"Thine entirely. Thine entirely, O my God, I am." Begin to build this living temple, and the Lord help you to complete it to his praise. A poor edifice it will be when you have finished it, compared with the Lord your God: but yet if you have labored sincerely and earnestly it will turn out to be compacted of gold and silver and precious stones, and it will be found in the day of Christ to honor and glory. So may the Lord bless you, beloved, now and for ever. Amen, and amen.

XVII.

A CALL TO THE LORD'S OWN FLOCK.

November 2, 1884.

"Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."—EZEKIEL xxxiv. 30, 31.

THE sermon of this morning is intended for the flock of God, and it will be directed very pointedly to that particular part of it here gathered in fellowship. God has been coming very near to us of late; for a considerable number of brethren and sisters have fallen asleep during the last few days; nearly all of them persons of ripe age, who have been gathered as sheaves in their season. Others are evidently upon the eve of departure, for their infirmities are multiplied, and their strength is small. When the Good Shepherd is taking one and another into his bosom, and bearing them away from us, the rest of us ought to recognize his presence with holy reverence. Let us feel that the ground whereon we stand is holy, and that the time is most suitable for increased devotedness of life. Let us number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom. If we do not live when life is seen to be so short, how foolish we must be! If we do not arouse ourselves when the Lord is calling home our brethren, we must be sluggards indeed. Let us spend the time of our sojourning here in fear, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

This is the special matter of which I would speak to-day. God has in great mercy gathered to himself a church in this place for these many years. He has multiplied the people and increased their joy, and we have joyed before him as with the joy of harvest. Nothing has happened to mar our unity or prevent our success; for God has been with us. Many have been added to us of such as are saved, and we have gone from strength to strength in Christian enterprise, never failing to accomplish our work. But the tendency of all human things is to deteriorate; there is a down-dragging influence in the world, and we ourselves are such creatures of the earth that we all too easily yield to its attractions If we run well for a time, yet we grow weary, and slacken our pace. This we do all the more readily, and unconsciously, if we are surrounded by those whose pace is slow. We are apt to think that our running is faster than need be, and that we shall be quite as well thought of if we keep up with the many, or are just a trifle in advance of them. Oh, how soon shall we lag in the rear if we listen to this evil suggestion! The voice of the Spirit to the church of Philadelphia was, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." It is a great thing to have done so well as to have a crown; it is a greater thing to hold it fast. Men of the world tell us that it takes much wit and industry to make a fortune; but that it is far more difficult to keep it when it is made: I am sure that in spiritual things it is so. For a church to be thoroughly prosperous in the life and work of God is difficult enough; but to continue so,—this is the work, this is the labor. Hence our cries to God that he will be pleased to keep us as a church faithful to his truth, united with one another, earnest in the glorifying of God, and diligent in the winning of souls. It would be

a calamity of no mean order if this church should decline. For the sake of those unpopular truths which we uphold, it is a matter for daily prayer that this church may be maintained in honorable usefulness evermore. To that end I wish to speak with you this morning, my own dear brethren and sisters. Strangers must pardon me if I make much of you, and even seem to be egotistical in my address. I risk all that for the sake of the necessary truth which I must put before you.

To my mind, this day is a day of good tidings. The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. Let us glory in his holy name; and let us walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, so that we may enjoy a continuance of his favor. May the outstretched arm of the Most High still be with us, that we may see more and more of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards fallen man.

I. Calling your attention to our text, I shall notice, first, what the text rather suggests than declares, namely, OUR PROFESSION TOWARDS GOD. Read on,—"Thus shall they know that I Jehovah am their God." It is implied, then, that *we avow Jehovah to be our God.* So many of us as are joined together in church fellowship here have declared that Jehovah is the one only living and true God. He has revealed himself to us in these latter days as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we unfeignedly accept the triune God as our God for ever and ever. Other Lords have had dominion over us, but now we yield ourselves unto God without reserve. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of believers to this day. We do not wish to have any other God, although in these days the carnally wise have set up another. Their god is a god who has no justice or righteousness: he takes small account of sin, and mainly seeks to make

things pleasant all round. This effeminate deity now occupies the place once given to Apollo or Venus, and he is as much a false god as they were. Our God does not suffer one attribute to eclipse another, he has all excellencies in perfection. Remember how Moses spake concerning our God, and said, "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty." "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

A second profession we have made is this, that *we are his people.* "That they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God." This is involved in the first profession, but it is not always sufficiently thought of. We are, as believers, in common with all the people of God, separated unto his service, consecrated to his glory. We believe that he chose us, or ever the earth was, to be a peculiar people unto himself. We believe that he hath redeemed us from among men, according to that word, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." We believe that by the decree of God we are adopted into the divine family and acknowledged to be the children of the living God, even we who were once heirs of wrath even as others. We are his people because the Holy Spirit has wrought upon us, and we have been turned from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan unto God. Our song is, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." We acknowledge the claim founded upon our redemption, "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." To glorify God in our spirits and in our bodies, which are alike redeemed, is our reasonable service. Our bands are loosed, we are no more the servants of men: new bonds are about us, for we are now the servants of the living God. In Jehovah

is our trust, our joy, our glory. Each one of us can say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." To serve him is its own reward. To dwell with him is heaven. Is it not so with you, my brethren? Have you not lifted up your hands unto the Lord so that you cannot go back? Do you not wish to realise that promise, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"?

Further than that, we have also professed and avowed *our joyful confidence in our Immanuel—God with us.* It is an interesting thing to me that this name should be in my text. Look carefully at the English and you will see it in the very first sentence—"that I the Lord their God am with them." Leave out the word "am," which is in italics, and you get it, "God with them." What is this but "God with us"? To-day we believe in the Lord Jesus, who is God with us. God hath come down among men; he hath taken upon himself their nature, so that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man in one ever-blessed and indivisible person, and therefore he is very nigh unto us, yea, next of kin to us. We rejoice in him as "God with us,"—our brother, friend, and husband. Have we not found it so? Has there not been a divine nearness between our souls and Christ since that first day when we touched his garment's hem and were made whole? Why, brethren, we have gone on to lean our heads upon his bosom in heavenly rest, like John of old; yea, some of you have emulated Simeon; for you have taken up the Lord's Christ into your arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Through Christ Jesus we do not only believe in God as yonder in heaven, but in God by his Holy Spirit dwelling here among men, stirring our hearts, ruling our lives, enlightening our understandings, hal-

lowing our affections, and sanctifying our whole being unto God. Is it not so? You do so confess.

This is a very large profession. We are not inclined to start back from it; but when we take it in its threefold character,—this God our God, ourselves his people, and himself, by his Son Jesus Christ, "God with us,"—oh, then I say it is a very solemn avowal, and one which calls us to a lofty form of life. Blessed are they who stand to this confession, and walk worthily of it; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto them.

Jehovah is our God, in opposition to Romanism and Ritualism, with their idols of one form and another, to which they bow the knee. The invisible Jehovah is our God, and not the host, the virgin, the crucifix, or any visible thing. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the new gods of "modern thought," which your fathers knew not: our faith finds light as well in the majesty of the Old Testament as in the mercy of the New. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the "no God" of infidelity. We believe in a personal God, and we put our trust in him as hearing our prayers; we are his people, and on him we call; he has come very near to us, and with him we have sweet communion through Jesus Christ his Son. This is our profession: we dare not say less; we could not say more.

Now every profession of so solemn a sort should be backed up with proof. Where shall the proof be found?

II. That shall be our second subject of discourse—OUR PROOF FROM GOD. "Thus shall they know that I Jehovah am with them, and that they are my people, saith the Lord God." How shall they know it? In this one way, —by the presence of God among us. If God work among us, then shall even our adversaries say, "Jehovah-Shammah," the Lord is there. A tree is known by its fruit,

and the rule applies even to God himself. God is known among us by the acts that he doeth. He discovers his presence unto his people by his deeds of grace. I want you to look back through the chapter and then to see whether we have or have not as a church the marks of Jehovah's presence, by which we are attested to be his people.

The first mark is *the gathering in of the scattered.* See verse eleven. "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep." I am bound to bear witness that in the midst of us many have been sought out and saved who but a little while ago were wandering far away from Christ. Whenever I give notice that I will see friends who wish to join the church, I am cheered by the many who present themselves. They fly as doves to their windows. They tell me glad news of their conversion—news which makes my heart to leap for joy. The Lord calls some who were grossly ignorant of the gospel, to whom it came as a fresh light from heaven; and he calls others who knew the truth, but slighted it, and turned away from it year after year. He removes hard-heartedness and indifference by his grace. His own voice calls men, and they come to him. Conversions are among us at this time very many; not only from my own preaching of the word, else might I speak with less freedom, but from the school, the mission-stations, the street-preaching, the tract-distributing, and from every form of effort. Frequently, when I have spoken with a number of new converts, I have found the larger proportion not brought to Jesus Christ by my word from this platform, but brought to him by you, dear brothers and

sisters, who have laid yourselves out to win souls. I am but one, and you are many; there should be more fruit to the Lord from five thousand of you than from me. I have desired this, and prayed for it, that you all may be useful. May God multiply you, and make you spiritual parents, every one of you, till we may quote the words of Solomon's Song, and apply them to you,—"They are like a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"; so said your Lord, and ye will not forget his words. Conversion is the sure sign of the immediate presence of the Lord. I pray him to give us a token of his being with us this morning in your conversion, O wounded heart! May some poor trembler come to Jesus, some penitent plead the promise, "I will heal that which is broken," some wanderer look to the cross and live. The Lord has promised that he will search his sheep and seek them out, and he has fulfilled that word in our midst, therefore is he with us. If I had to stand here and say to you, "Brethren, there are no conversions, none are brought to repentance and faith," then might we hold days for fasting and humiliation, and we might each one weep his eyes out, because the glory has departed. But the Lord has not left us. No ear has heard the awful words within the holy place saying, "Let us go hence." Glory be to his name, his hand is stretched out still for miracles of grace.

A second token of the Lord's presence is *the feeding of the flock.* The Holy Spirit seems to lay great stress upon that: for thus saith the Lord in verse fifteen: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down. There shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed." Have we not found it so? Have not

our Sabbaths been times of holy festival? Has not the King himself banqueted with us? At the communion-table have we not been transported with such joys as can never be excelled until we behold the Chief Shepherd face to face? When we speak with one another at the close of the Sabbath-day is not the greeting habitual to some of us, "The Lord has been with us again to-day"? You have wished that there were six Sundays and only one workday in the week. I know that many of you have fed upon the word with great delight. Value greatly this boon, for it comes not from man, but is a choice gift of God. There are congregations where the sheep look up and are not fed; there are places where the Sabbath is the most wearisome day of the week, because the people want the gospel and the gospel is withheld from them. Saints of God cannot feed upon the husks of philosophical systems or semi-rationalistic speculations. The speech which is half of Ashdod and half of Jerusalem suits not the inhabitant of Zion, it is a strange language to him. God grant to this flock, whoever may be their pastor in years to come, that they may relish the gospel, and find it sweet to their palates, and strengthening to their hearts.

Another token of the presence of the Good Shepherd is *the healing of the sick;* I mean the spiritually sick, for there is this promise given, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." It is a rare joy to restore such as have been overtaken in a fault. Lately I have received several brethren and sisters who had aforetime gone from us through laxity of life or through falling into novelties of opinion. I am glad to see among those who come to unite with us familiar faces which for a while

had been missed. Those who have lived where Jesus dwells do not feel easy till they return to such society. They are saying, "We will return to our brethren, with whom we assembled beforetime, for it was better with us then than now." The presence of the Lord acts like a charm upon the wanderers, and they hasten to return at his bidding. It is pleasant to hear the returning penitent confess how cold in heart he grew, and how he sought to find satisfaction in the things of the world, and to hear him tell how he has been brought back to be in future more resolutely faithful, and more humbly dependent upon God. The showers of grace which have fallen upon us have caused many withered branches to bud forth again. Many are singing, "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." If there should have strayed in here this morning any who once were among believers, and happy in the Lord, but have been away for a while, and have lost the fervor of their love, let me entreat them to hasten their return. O my brother, come back! O my sister, come back! We shall welcome you with intense delight. Like as the man who lost one sheep left the ninety-and-nine to find it, and rejoiced more over the finding of the one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that had not gone astray, so will it be with us. If backsliders are not brought back in any church, I should conclude that God is not there; but when they do come back, we rejoice in this evidence of his presence. The God of our salvation hath devised means to bring home his banished, and therefore he is still in the midst of us. Glory be to his condescending love!

A further proof of the presence of God in a church is when *the Lord Jesus Christ is greatly honored;* for here it is written, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and

he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I, Jehovah, will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it." O brothers, if we did not gather to the name of Christ our gathering would not be a church of God. If the testimony which issues from our midst were not of Jesus, and of his precious blood, and of his kingdom, and of his coming, then we might know that the Lord was not with us, for only as we know Christ will God know us. If your faith rested anywhere but in the glorious person and finished work of the Son of God, it were a worthless faith. If I preached any other gospel than that which ye have received I should be an Anathema, and not a servant of God. And if you did not labor with all your might to bring souls to Jesus rather than to any sect or party, and to set Jesus forth rather than any peculiar *ism*, then might we rest assured that the Lord was not with us. But in this matter we are clear, for to us Christ is all. Do you not love Jesus? I appeal to your hearts, ye that have been baptized into the thrice holy name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

> "Is not his name melodious still
> To your attentive ear?
> Does not your heart with pleasure bound,
> Your Saviour's voice to hear?"

If a Sunday should roll by without Christ, would it not be the reverse of a Sabbath to you? You would sadly miss the risen One on his own resurrection day. If we should gather together, and there should be no discourse concerning him, and no savor of his name, would you not go away disappointed? He is the first and the last of our hope, the author and finisher of our faith, the

chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely; and just in proportion as it is so, the Lord is with us. He will never forget those who honor his Son, and seek to advance his kingdom.

Jesus is our prince; his authority is supreme among us. No popes, bishops, or councils may legislate for us. Jesus is our king. If he be indeed the Lord of whom we are the loyal subjects, then the Lord our God is with us, and we are his people. Where Jesus is there dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. As he that believeth in him hath everlasting life, so hath he fellowship with the living God. You shall judge for yourselves whether this be not the token among us that our profession is no lie, but that Jehovah is our God, and we are his people.

A further evidence of the Lord's presence with a people is found in *their prevailing peace of mind.* "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Do not many of you realize that deep peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, so that you are free from all fear, and happy amid grievous poverty and trial? By reason of your great numbers, I cannot converse much with you personally while you are in health, but I do have the sorrowful privilege of speaking with many brethren and sisters in the time of sickness and death; and my uniform experience is most joyful. To this statement I can remember no exception whatever within my memory. When our members come near to die they exhibit peace—deep, profound; and frequently joy is mingled therewith, and a holy exultation. I have said, again and again, as I have left the sick chamber, "Let me go that I may die with him." Though emaci-

ated, and perhaps full of agonizing pain, each one of our friends has said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." They have had no more doubt about the divine verities than about their own existence, and no more fear when looking into eternity than they had in going upstairs to their bed—nay, not so much, for they have had a longing to depart and to be with Christ. "Our people die well," said Wesley; and I can say the same. They pass away in sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection. Not long ago, one who preaches far other doctrine than mine complained bitterly that he could make no headway with people of your sort, because those who have once fallen under the influence of our doctrine are settled in it, and cannot be rescued from it. He said that no headway could be made against our views, for men become so desperately enamored of them that they cannot be weaned from them. Blessed be God for that. Let a man once know the living God, and feel his eternal love within his bosom, and all the devils in hell cannot make him leave the doctrine which is life unto his soul. Argument is useless against truth written upon the heart. Sophistry cannot persuade us out of our consciousness. The truth of God has been sealed upon our hearts, and it is not possible that we should renounce it. In this I do rejoice, that the evil beasts cease out of the land. When the doctrines of grace flame forth in the midst of a people, doubters and heretics quit the place in disgust. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon." Wolves shun the flock when the Chief Shepherd is in the midst of it. So may it be even to the end of the chapter,—sure evidence that God is with his people, giving them deep peace of mind, and solid rest as to the things of God. These tokens we have, and many others which

we cannot now stay to mention: read the chapter through and judge for yourselves.

I desire to speak to you with no flattering words, but wish soberly to testify what I have seen, desiring ever to be taught of the Spirit of God, that I may speak no further than I can justify by fact. I can say, and do say, "The Lord of hosts is with us." What then? Then it seems to me that *it becomes every member of this church*, as indeed of every other, *to be very careful how he lives and walks.* If the Lord be with us, remember there is a discipline going on in the church every day; not only that which the church can execute by itself, but that which God in providence executes. "His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." Good men, if they hinder the work of God, are not dealt with as the ungodly, and suffered to go on their evil way, but frequently they are laid aside, and their influence is taken from them. Even more than this: I doubt not that many are removed by death when they become obstacles to the truth, or fall into sin. "For this cause," said Paul to the Corinthians, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Thus believers are chastened of the Lord that they should not be condemned with the world. God will not have his own child transgress the rules of his house without chastising him. Hence the need of careful behavior on the part of church members. If any of you who are God's children are walking carelessly, if your garments are spotted with the world, if you are dishonoring the name of your Lord by an unhallowed conversation, the Lord will not walk with you in joyful fellowship. "Many walk, of whom I have told you often," said the apostle, "and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"; these were inside the church, and yet ene-

mies. None can hinder the work of God so much as God's professed people if they are not true to their profession. Beloved, to live up to that which I laid down at the commencement of this sermon will require more power than we possess. We shall want the Spirit of God abundantly to rest upon us, that our walk may be close with God, and our actions such as become the gospel of Christ.

In addition to this, it seems to me that if God be with us, *now is the time for abounding activities.* In evil days we tug the laboring oar to small purpose, for the vessel makes no progress against the tide; but now that a favoring wind is with us, let us spread every yard of sail. "Crowd all thy canvas on, cut through the foam." Now is the mariner's happy hour, and he must avail himself of it. If there be anything more that we can do, if there be any forgotten enterprise which we can revive, if there be a possibility of greater ardor, and intenser zeal, in the name of God let us rise to it. Let us withhold no power from the Lord's service, lest measurably upon us also should come the curse pronounced of old: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It is a day of good tidings, we do not well if we sit still. See to it, ye servants of God, that ye prove by your activity that the Lord is among you.

Again, *let our prayers be more fervent.* Nothing comforts my heart like the prayer-meetings which are so continual among us. Even the little gathering for prayer which meets on Thursday before my sermon has grown to larger proportions, and we have delightful seasons of communion with God. As for our Monday evening assemblies, what a benediction from the Lord!

Now that our hundreds at prayer are verging into thousands it delights my heart to see them. I had hardly hoped to see so many constantly coming to pray. May your prayerfulness at home, in your families and in your closets, be increased continually. What cannot the Lord do with a church if it will but be ready to be used? All things are possible to him; and all things are possible to him that believeth. In general the Lord says to his people, "Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss"; but when the spirit of supplication is poured out, then, verily, the Lord is there. We love each other with a pure heart, fervently, therefore let us remove everything that could mar our perfect unity in Christ Jesus, for then shall we have continually abundant evidence that we have taken the Lord to be our God, that we are his people, and that he is God with us, and that his glory dwells among us. Thus have I tried to press the matter home upon you. The Lord bless the exhortation.

III. A very interesting part of our discourse this morning lies in OUR DESCRIPTION BY GOD. How does God describe his own church? Read the last verse of the text. "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."

First, in this description God calls his church *his flock.* A flock is the shepherd's treasure, it is his living wealth; but it is also the shepherd's care, it is his constant anxiety. Ask a shepherd what he prizes most, and he tells you, of course, his flock. Demand what he cares for most, and he replies, "I have no other care but this, my flock; for this I spend my days in the heat and my nights in the damp and the cold." Only think of the Lord's looking down upon his people here and saying, "Ye are my flock." Some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude; but believers are not compared to

bears, or lions, or other animals that wander alone; but those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect, that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks, and so do God's people. The Lord loves them best as a company.

> "He likes the tents of Jacob well,
> But still in Zion loves to dwell."

Christ is the good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep: and he folds them, guards them, protects them as his flock. A true church is therefore a very precious thing; it is not a mere human society banded together for certain objects, but it is a community which God himself hath formed, and over which he doth watch with an unsleeping eye. If it is a flock which he cares for, so that heaven and earth shall be ransacked but what he will have provender for them. This flock is so well preserved that at the last the great Shepherd will say, "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

Observe that it is added, "*The flock of my pasture.*" There is a different idea here. It shows that God's people are not only peculiar in other things, but they are peculiar in their feeding. You may know a child of God by that which his soul lives upon. Many professors can feed on any mortal thing, so long as it is cleverly put. "Have you heard So-and-so preach?" "No, I have not, but I have heard that he has departed from the truth." "But," says one, "he is a wonderfully clever man;" and if a man is only clever, the generality of people will accept anything he likes to bring, from heaven above, or from the earth beneath, or from the waters under the earth. It does not matter to most people so long as the man can deliver his opinions fluently and poetically. But such are not Christ's sheep, for they

have not the discernment of the faithful. "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." I remember hearing a brother tell how he disproved the notion that sheep only know the shepherd by his dress. When in Palestine he asked a shepherd to allow him to put on his clothes. Then he began to call the sheep, but never a one would come, not even a lamb. The most sheepish of the flock had sense enough left to know that he was not the shepherd, and even the youngest kept aloof, heedless of the stranger's voice. He might have called till he was hoarse, but they would not come. So God's people know their Lord, and they know the kind of food which he gives them. They know the truth from a lie. Men put the falsehood so prettily that they would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect; but that "if it were possible" guards the chosen flock of God's pasture. They will not graze on the hemlock, nor feed on poisoned grain. They will have nothing but clean provender, and the more evidently it comes from the great Shepherd's own hand the better it is to them.

It is a very singular thing, but it is added, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are men.*" This was inserted, some commentators think, lest the reader should think that the Lord was really speaking of sheep. This cannot be true; for no rational being could be so foolish as to fall into the mistake, The language is used for a much higher purpose. "Ye are men": then God knows what kind of persons we are, whom he has loved with an everlasting love. We are Adams, not angels. If you come into the church of God, and expect to get among angels, you will be mightily mistaken; and if the brethren should receive you, and hope that they are receiving

angels unawares, they will be mistaken, too. We make absurd mistakes through foolish expectations. We shall not find that our brethren and sisters are male and female cherubim, for they are men and women, and nothing more. They are fallen men, too, bearing about them traces of the ruin of their nature; they went astray like lost sheep, even the best of them. They are men, that is to say, they are only men; for the best of men are but men at the best. Somebody once wrote to me a letter of denunciation for using that sentence; and, as far as I could make out from his letter, the friend thought himself to be something more than a man. I did not coincide with his judgment, but fancied that he was rather less than more of a man: from the bitter spirit of his letter I thought him more human than humane. The best men I have ever seen are but men; and, generally, the better men are the more ready they are to confess their imperfection. Some are tall by the measurement of conceit, but short when brought to the standard of wisdom. God's people are but men; yet they are men and not brutes. There are in human form many who are hardly so good as brutes; but the saints are gentle, compassionate and gracious. God's people are true men: when the Spirit of God is in them they quit themselves like men; they come to the front and bear the brunt of the battle. "Ye are men,"—it is a bad word in one sense, but a good one in another. God make us men in the better sense, and may we rise superior to the infirmities of "men" in the worse sense, by being humble, yet brave.

But then he adds this blessed assurance, "*And I am your God.*" God is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of a man, that he should repent. I hear that poor soul seeking after God, say, "Oh, but I am so un-

worthy." Just so. The Lord knows it. He says you are men. But then he is not unworthy; he is worthy to receive honor and power divine, for he is our God. "Alas," says one, "I feel myself so weak." Just so. You are men, but then he is your God, your strength is in him. "But I am so changeable." Just so, for you are men; but then he says, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "But I am so faithless." Just so, for you are men, and men are fickle and frail; but God changeth not, he is the same, and of his years there is no end. If the promises rested on you for keeping, then they would never be kept, for you are men. If your salvation depended on your own merits you would be lost, for you are men; but inasmuch as the whole covenant, and the whole weight of salvation rests with God, here is our joy, "I am your God, saith the Lord God."

I have two words to say. One is to the poor sinner. He says, "I am afraid to come to God in Christ Jesus." Do not be afraid to come, for he knows what you are. "Oh, but I am so vile." He knows how vile you are. "But I am everything I ought not to be." He knows that. That is why he sent a Saviour. If you had not been lost, there would have been no need for him to seek you out. Come to Jesus just as you are, poor trembler, and let this word beckon you to him, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." You are poor, weak, feeble, erring, undeserving men, but your God is full of mercy, and his thoughts of love are as high above your thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. Come now and reason together with him, and he will put away your sins as a cloud and your transgressions as a thick cloud, and you shall sing, "Who is a God like unto thee?"

The other word is to you that ought to be members

of the church, who know the Lord and love him, but have never confessed him. You say, "I shall join the church when I feel better." When will that be? Are you any better than you were a year ago? How much better are you going to be before you obey your Lord? I should like to hang up a sort of thermometer so that when you did reach the point you might come out, obey your Lord's command, and join with his church. Do you want to be perfect, and to join with perfect men? If you do, do not come to this church, because I will warrant you there is not a perfect member in it, though there are many of the excellent of the earth in our midst. We had some perfect brethren once; but they went to their own place after having proved to us that their boasted perfection was very poor stuff. When workers get that proud notion into their heads they become both useless and unloving. We are sorry to say that we are a company of imperfect men and women; but we shall be very glad to receive you if you love the Lord and are prepared to obey his commands. That is all we require. Do you want to join a perfect church? You must die. You will not do it else. And if you were to join a perfect church, I am sure it would not be perfect after you had been admitted into it. You had better give up that idea, and just believe what God says about his own church, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." Come, then, with us, and we will do thee good. "I am afraid," says one. Is this like a man? Can we say of such cowards, "Ye are men"? We cannot give you the good side of the word, surely. But come with us. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, confess him. The gospel message is, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." Faith and baptism are here placed very closely together: do not divide them. "He that with

his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." Neglect not one command of Christ: confess your faith at once. "There is nothing saving in it," say you. Selfish wretch, so you will do nothing except to save your own skin. If you are a saved man, you will loathe such meanness, and you will say, "Now, for the love I bear my Master's name, whatever command he gives to his believing people I am ready to obey.

> "Through floods or flames, if Jesus leads,
> I'll follow where he goes;
> 'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
> Though earth and hell oppose."

God grant you his blessing in so doing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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